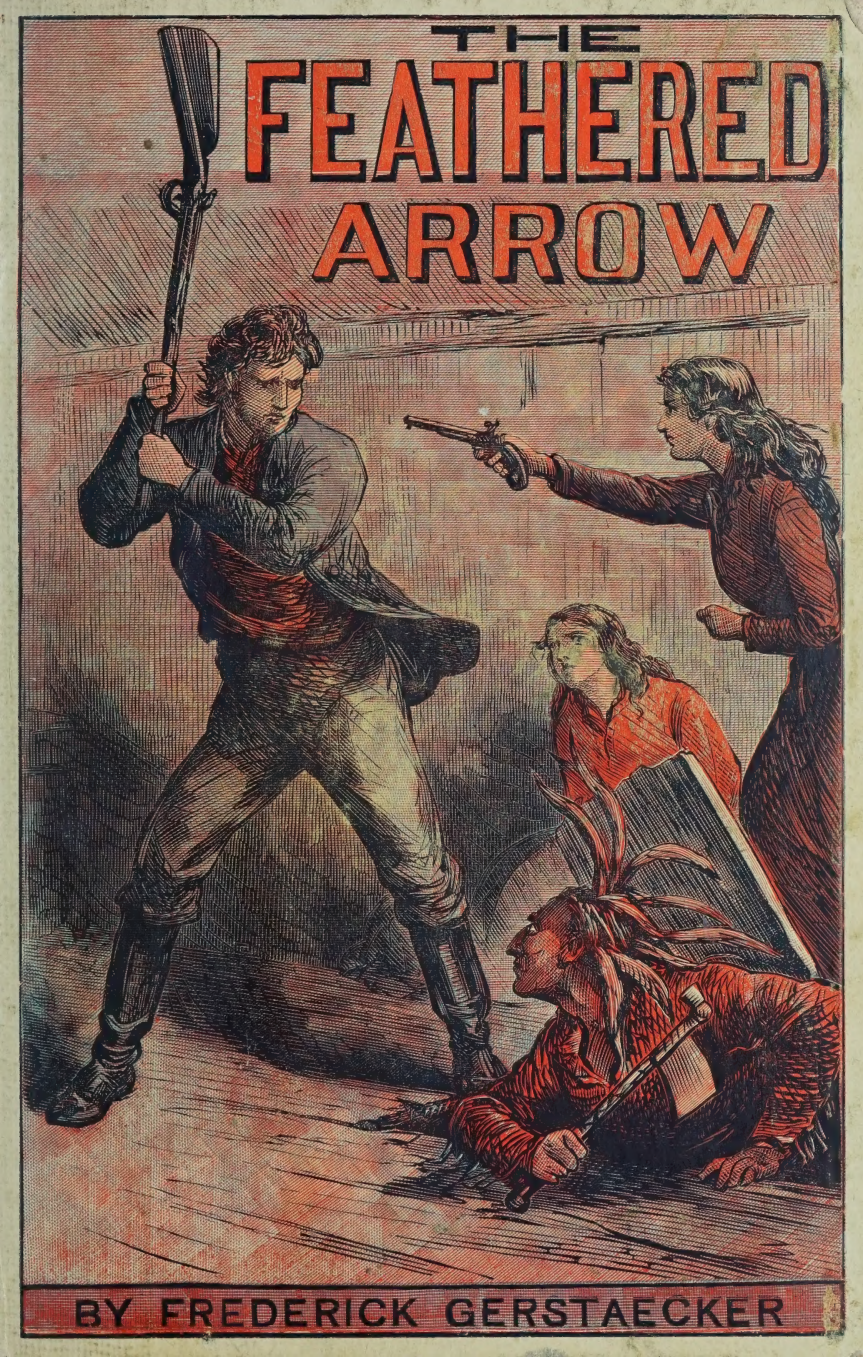
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ARROW
BY FREDERICK GERSTAECKER

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THE

FEATHERED ARROW

OR

THE FOREST RANGERS

BY

FREDERICK GERSTAËCKER

AUTHOR OF

"PIRATES OF THE MISSISSIPPI," 'THE TWO CONVICTS," ETC.

LONDON
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS, LIMITED
BROADWAY, LUDGATE HILL
MANCHESTER AND NEW YORK

Frederick Gerstaëcker (1816-1874) was born at Hamburg. He emigrated to New York, and travelled over a considerable part of North America, being at different times a sailor, a jeweller, a hotel-keeper, a farmer and a steamboat stoker. He returned to Germany in 1842, but spent the years 1849-52 in travelling over a great part of the world. His novels are popular within country.

GERSTAËCKER'S NOVELS.

A WIFE TO ORDER.
EACH FOR HIMSELF.
THE FEATHERED ARROW.
THE TWO CONVICTS.
A SAILOR'S ADVENTURES.

PREFACE.

A FEW prefatory remarks will be sufficient to introduce this tale of the Western forests of America to the notice of the reader, and to prepare him for what follows.

Arkansas, received into the Union of the United States so late as 1836, for a long time had the unenviable reputation, afterwards attributed to Texas, of being a place of refuge for the offscourings of society of the East and South. In its forests and morasses delinquents of every kind found an asylum from the avenging arm of justice; and within its boundaries they gave free scope to their evil propensities.

The imputation was not altogether unfounded. Law and order were set at defiance by the early settlers in this state. Before the law-officers could seize the criminal, he had taken flight, perhaps on the back of his neighbour's horse, and escaped into a neighbouring county, and was seen and heard of no more.

Even when prisoners were seized, it was a difficult task to keep them; for they either broke out of the blockhouse in which they had been imprisoned, or were liberated on the first night of their confinement by a band of friends, who perhaps thought it hardly worth while to blacken their faces in order to disguise themselves.

Those men were principally addicted to horse-stealing. Ac-

cording to Western fashion, the cattle and flocks of the early settlers were left to graze freely in the forests, finding their own food, and were therefore subject to little control, and often to none at all. When, moreover, in 1839, capital punishment for horse-stealing was abolished, many persons, in several parts of the State, made it their business to "deal in horseflesh," and the backwoodsmen were at last compelled to adopt severe measures.

The laws were insufficient to protect them in their isolated farms, often separated by an interval of many miles. The "men of Arkansas," therefore, formed what was called the League of the Regulators. They seized all suspected persons, whipped their prisoners until they either confessed their crimes or pointed out their fellow-criminals, and hung or shot the evil-doers, if the crime could be satisfactorily brought home to them.

It may be well imagined that this arbitrary course of proceeding led to the infliction of wrong; and on several occasions innocent persons were dragged from their peaceful homes, chastised, and imprisoned. Their free Arkansian blood, of course, rose against such undeserved ill-treatment, and the inhabitants sought to obtain satisfaction by taking the law into their own hands. The Regulators were assassinated both openly and secretly. The aim of the Regulators was, however, ultimately accomplished; and after several victims had fallen a prey to Lynch-law, the horse-stealers and other malefactors perceived that there might be, even in America, more secure and comfortable quarters for them than any in Arkansas. Many fled to the "Indian nation"—that is, took refuge with Chocktaws and Cherokees; but the majority migrated to Texas; and Arkansas is at this

moment nearly delivered from the presence of this scum of a free people.

The scenes described in these pages are supposed to have taken place when the evil had reached the highest pitch, and self-protection had become a matter of necessity to the farmers and hunters. The principal events related are by no means fictitious—they actually occurred, though in many different places and at longer intervals. The Methodist preacher, in particular, is a figure purely historical. I was myself an eye-witness of several of the scenes which are described; and I once wrote down, on the spot, the names of six-and-twenty men, respectable settlers, which had, by the assistance of the Regulators and the application of black hickory, been extorted from a suspected person.

The reader is invited, if his patience will bear the ordeal, to put himself under the author's guidance. He will transport him into the beautiful forests of that magnificent country; and if, after perusing the book, he does not actually feel inclined to get into the saddle and assist the backwoodsmen in endeavouring to follow a trail in the direction of the distant regions of the Far West, I hope, at least, that he will, in addition to some less agreeable characters, make the acquaintance of some good, kind, and open-hearted people, whose virtues may serve to reconcile him to the darker tints of this picture of life and manners in the wilds of America.

THE FEATHERED ARROW;

OR,

THE FOREST RANGERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE READER MAKES THE ACQUAINTANCE OF FOUR WORTHY INDIVIDUALS, AND LEARNS SOMETHING RESPECTING THEIR MODE OF LIFE.

THE rude storms of early spring had been succeeded by the genial month of May; buds and blossoms burst forth from beneath the yellow layer of leaves by which the ground, only occasionally enlivened by patches of greensward, was still covered. Flower after flower appeared on the branches of the low log-wood trees, the luxuriant creepers wound their way from tree to tree, converting with their blossoms the wilderness into a garden, and filling with their fragrance the bowers formed by gigantic pine, oak, and sassafras trees. Although the sun penetrated through the bushy screen formed by the branches of these gigantic monarchs of the woods, yet the maze of creepers and brushwood beneath was only now and then pierced by a stray gleam, which shot rapidly to the ground. Twilight prevailed in these inmost recesses of the forest, even when the sun was shining high in the heavens. This subdued kind of light seemed to be congenial to certain individuals who had taken up their station at the base of a large pine tree. One of the party, stretching out his legs, and gazing at the leafy roof above him, said:—

"A splendid spot this for confidential meetings—a most excellent place—as good as if it had been made for the purpose. The swamp near the river certainly prevents any reasonable being from intruding in that direction; while, on the other hand, the brambles and briars on our right are not sufficiently inviting to induce a person to plunge into them without some special object in view. Nothing of

the kind is likely to present itself to any one, for we have taken care that no game should be left in the locality."

The speaker, as far as one could judge from the partial view to be obtained of him in the comfortable position he had taken up, was a tall man, muscularly built, and with bold, open features. His eyes bore a strangely wild expression, as they glanced unsteadily from side to side, and his whole exterior betokened negligence. His old and half-crushed beaver hat had fallen from his head, and his bushy hair hung about his shoulders in a disorderly manner, showing that it had not been very recently combed. His beard was of a week's growth, and his threadbare blue jersey, from which several pieces of what had once been yellow fringe depended, was covered with stains of blood, some of them apparently fresh, and others of older date, for the former of which a newly-skinned deer at his side might account. His legs were cased in leathern gaiters, which had been frequently repaired, and a pair of buffalo skin mocassins completed his by no means attractive attire.

Another man, who sat at the side of the one whom we have just described, leaning against the trunk of a tree, with a large knife in his hand, or, as it was called in the language of the country, an *Arkansas toothpick*, was busily engaged whittling, and he appeared to advantage when compared with his companion. His dress was cleaner, his leathern jacket, though old and well worn, seemed to be of better materials and more carefully attended to than that of his friend, and his general appearance showed that he had received a better education than is usually obtained by the wild inhabitants of the woods, or that at least he had not long quitted the roof of his parents. His youth rendered this still more probable, as he could hardly be more than seventeen years old.

The third person of the group was very different from the former two. Their exuberance of animal spirits was qualified by his gentleness and good-nature. Judging from his attire, he belonged to the better class of farmers. His blue coat, of the best woollen materials, the common dress of the American husbandman, his pepper-and-salt trowsers, his bright yellow waistcoat, carefully brushed shoes, new hat, in fact every article of his apparel, showed that he paid

considerable attention to his personal appearance, and that, if in other respects he assimilated himself to the company he was keeping, he did not do this as far as the outward man was concerned. Leaning against a small oak tree, with his legs crossed, he looked vacantly at the speaker; and the latter having made the observation respecting the scarcity of game, stretched himself at full length on the moss which grew round the roots of the tree.

"Or, at any rate, Cotton attends to that just now," he replied, in a nasal tone of voice; "though it is not proper that you should on the Sabbath, excepting in cases of emergency, go about killing the peaceful animals of the wood."

"Oh! confound your sermonizing," the hunter exclaimed, half angrily, while their young companion cast a defiant glance at the first speaker. "Reserve your moralising for the settlement, and don't bother us here with your nonsense. I wonder where Rusch hides himself—I will be hanged if I can make him out. He promised to be here at sunrise, and it has been up these three hours. Plague upon him!"

"You will not bring him by your blasphemous oaths," the farmer rejoined, nodding his head; "but," he continued, growing rather impatient himself, "I begin to find the time rather long; I have to be at the prayer-meeting by ten o'clock, and the place is six miles off."

"You seem to blend the two occupations very well," exclaimed the hunter, with a smile. "Preaching and horse-stealing agree remarkably, for the Sabbath is but a poor day for our trade; however, I beseech you to drop the former when we are together. To say the least of it, it is tiresome."

"Don't be afraid," rejoined the farmer, leisurely taking a pinch of snuff from a shell box. "Look!" he continued, rapidly; "your dog is pricking his ears, he has caught scent of something."

During this short conversation a grey and black dog reclined a few steps in advance of the men, on the only sunny spot where the gap formed by a fallen tree, which had not yet been filled up by the surrounding branches, permitted the warm rays of the sun to penetrate. The animal slowly and cautiously sniffed the wind for a minute, gave a low growl,

making a feeble attempt at wagging his tail, and then resumed his former repose. His master, who had closely observed the motions of the dog, jumped up with a contented smile, exclaiming :—

"Well, he is coming at last—it is time he was here ; Dash knows him well enough, and he wont get up ; he must be comfortable in that patch of sun ;—hallo ! here he is. Well, Rusch, you must think one comes here for pleasure, among the mosquitoes and wood-lice. What on earth could have prevented your being here at the right time ?"

The new-comer appeared to be a middle-aged man, and, like the farmer, whose name, by the way, was Rowson, was decently and properly dressed. He carried a shot-belt and a long rifle upon his shoulder.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he replied, in acknowledgment of the greeting of his comrades. "You must excuse my not coming earlier, it was not possible ; that young rascal Brown, and old Harper, with that cursed red-skin, were sneaking about in my path, and I did not wish to be seen coming in this direction. These good people begin to be a good deal too knowing to suit me, and that sly scalping-knife is always prowling about in the woods. I really do not see why we should suffer that Indian to remain in our neighbourhood. I have an idea that the bullet is already cast which is to summon him to his hunting-grounds ; but Cotton," he continued, turning angrily to the hunter, "I wish you would not call me by that cursed name ; it will some day escape you in the hearing of strangers, and then I shall be done for. You had better call me Johnson, even amongst ourselves ; you will thus get accustomed to it."

"It's all the same to me," replied the other, laughing ; "be it Rusch or Johnson, you will not escape the halter any more than we shall. Let us be merry while we are together ; and now to business, for during the last fortnight we have not made a cent, and it is time to begin work again."

While speaking he had taken a small flask of whisky from under his blanket ; he now drew out the cork, and, nodding at Rowson, raised the flask to his lips with a look of intense delight.

Having satisfied himself with a hearty draught, he offered the bottle to Rowson, who was standing close to him.

"There, prime yourself for your sermon this morning; you will need it. I am sure I should require the contents of three such bottles to induce me to be present, and even then I should make a condition that you waited until I had fallen asleep before you commenced."

"Thanks," said Rowson, refusing the proffered draught in a friendly manner. "I should not like to smell of whisky this morning. Give it to Johnson; he is casting eager glances at it."

"There is nothing better than a good stimulant in the morning," said the new-comer, drinking to Cotton in return; "but Weston," he continued, addressing the youngest of the company, "what are you doing? You are scratching yourself as if, like a serpent, you were about to cast your skin. Have you been bitten by a mosquito?"

"By one," said the young man, ill-humouredly, drawing nearer and taking the proffered flask from Johnson; "by one; the air here swarms with them; and I am inclined to think that old Harper was right when he said there were so many of these disgusting creatures in this neighbourhood that, by drawing one's knife once through the air, one might fill a plate with wings and legs."

"Ha! ha!" said Cotton, "you will get accustomed to that. It is true that you are still quite fresh from the Missouri mountains, where, as I have been told, people can sleep at night without keeping up a fire to smoke these insects. Here, that would be a difficult matter."

"Gentlemen, pray remember for what purpose we are assembled," observed Rowson, somewhat impatiently. "Time passes, and I must really be off. Moreover, I by no means consider this such a very secure place; more especially as Johnson saw the Indian, with his associates, prowling about in the neighbourhood. I therefore propose that we should go to work without more ado, and come to an understanding what we are to attempt, and how we are to begin."

"Well said, great prophet," cried Cotton, giving the speaker a smart blow on the shoulder, which caused him to pull a wry face and to cast a malicious side glance at his too familiar companion. Nor was he able to suppress his anger, save by the exercise of great self-control; and leisurely surveying the men as they stood around him, he continued:

"We have lain fallow for several weeks, and not made a penny—thanks to the officious rascals who are now making themselves busy under the name of Regulators, not only in this settlement, but in the whole county, even in the entire State. Yesterday, as you all know, a messenger arrived from the island, anxious to obtain a lot of good horses, while we are idling away our time, doing nothing. This cannot go on any longer: I want money—so does every one of you; and to gain by the labours of a year, in the culture of Indian corn and the rearing of swine, that which is ready at hand, would be ridiculous. Let us set to work at once. As by the good name I have managed to obtain for myself—though I am, after all, but a weak and sinful mortal ——"

"Oh, can't you leave off your nonsense?" exclaimed Cotton, stamping. "You can say your prayers when you are with Roberts; but no humbug here."

"As by the good name which I have managed to obtain for myself," repeated Rowson, with a conciliatory wave of the hand to Johnson, "I have procured the right of admission to many farms, I have, naturally enough, not wanted the opportunity of ascertaining the amount of live stock—especially horses—belonging to their owners. In my opinion, we can have no better place than Spring-creek, on the other side of the Petite-Jeanne, in which to commence operations. Husfield, who lives there, has splendid animals; and I am firmly convinced that from his farm alone we might get eight horses, and with these I can guarantee two days to get clear of pursuit."

"That would not be a bad plan," said Johnson; "but you should remember that it will take us fifty miles farther from the Mississippi."

"At the furthest, five-and-thirty," rejoined Rowson; "and we shall have two days and two nights in advance. While, if we remain in this country, we must expect them upon our traces in an hour—and that would be, to say the least of it, disagreeable."

"What should you say if we delayed the expedition till next week?" suggested Johnson. "I should like to take a trip down to the Washita."

"Not an hour," exclaimed Rowson. "Why should we trifle away time which may very soon be precious to us?"

"I cannot understand why you are all at once in such a hurry," said Cotton, astonished. "You used to let things grow upon you."

"I want money," answered Rowson, laconically. "My land has been surveyed, and if I do not pay in the full sum on the first Monday in June, I may be, as all of you know well enough, expelled by anybody who pleases, and—there are in this country certain very kind souls who would delight in playing me that trick. Among others, that Harper —a plague upon him——"

"Oh, Rowson, if Mrs. Roberts could hear you venting curses on the head of a fellow Christian, her good opinion of your piety would receive a shock."

"You may jeer at me, Cotton—you have the right to do so; but if I do not speak the truth in saying that there are some living hereabouts whose throats I could——We have nothing to do with that just now," he continued, restraining himself. "Speak out. Will you follow my advice, or not? It will enable us to make three hundred dollars a-piece in the space of one week, and that is more than we can accomplish in an honest manner."

"I am willing," exclaimed Cotton. "It is now the turn for you two to go first; we—Weston and I—risked our necks last time."

"Yes, yes," said Weston, in assent. "We were very nearly taken. This time it is our turn to do the easy part of the business."

"Stop; not so fast," interrupted Johnson. "We must first come to an understanding about the plan, and then I beg the two gentlemen to remember what a burden was thrown upon us in undertaking the sale, and that, in consequence, I am not yet free from suspicion. In the first place, with regard to the plan. How do you propose to accomplish it, Rowson?"

"Look," he replied, taking a large bowie-knife from under his waistcoat, and beginning to whittle. "Two of us—there must in no case be more, in order that suspicion may not be aroused, if we should be seen—two of us, then, I say, will start with our rifles, each being provided with two or three bridles, concealed in some manner or other about his person, from this place, in the direction of the Petite-Jeanne, to the

mill on the Spring-creek. I mention the bridles, that we may not have so much trouble in selling the horses as we did last time. The sharp bark cut the mouths of the animals, and the people in the island endeavoured to beat us down in price on that account. It is not far from the mill to Husfield's, and when the two men arrive at the corner of the fence, they must go to the left by the first footpath, which apparently leads back again to the wood. It only, however, makes a curve in order to avoid some fallen oaks, and afterwards turns again to the farm, conducting directly to the yard, the opposite side of which is connected with the house itself. Husfield has about seven-and-twenty horses, including foals and a stallion, of which eight are in the stables. These we must not touch; he would be sure to miss them the very next morning, and he is too well acquainted with the woods not to find out our tracks. The others are turned loose, under the guidance of a young three-year-old stallion."

"Surely," interrupted Johnson, "he is not allowed to have a stallion running about in the spring."

"For all that, he has," said Rowson. "At present, at least, I am sure the stallion is still loose, and comes regularly every evening to the fence after some mares. He trots about outside, making his neighing declarations, and then returns to the wood, his usual sleeping-place. The whole herd follow him, and that is just the time to get hold of the best horses. The people at the house do not look very sharp after the animals. I have called there twice in order to be certain upon that point."

"If we could get the mares out of the yard," said Weston, "we might secure the whole lot, and ride away with them as fast as their legs could carry them."

"Yes, and next morning we should have a dozen or so of those rascals, armed with rifles and knives a yard long, close upon our heels, in a track that a blind man could follow with his stick," exclaimed Rowson. "No, we must adopt a safer plan, for we must endeavour not only to escape capture, but also to avoid exciting suspicion; and this can be effected solely by the exercise of the greatest prudence. Those who are going to seize the horses must not be seen near the mill, as some of Husfield's people are generally loitering about

there; and faces from the Fourche-la-Fave—mine perhaps excepted—are not in very high repute in the northern settlements. The best plan would be to cross over to the other bank of the river, where the road approaches Spring-creek. This would be advisable for another reason. Anybody passing that way would be easily led into the idea that the horsemen had directed their flight towards Dardanella, and thus the chance of a meeting with some one that knows us may be avoided. Moreover, at the corner of the fence, where the road turns to the left, the ground is covered with stones, and our track over that road could scarcely be traced. What is to be done at the spot I need not explain, as you know well enough already."

"Who is to go?" asked Cotton, discontentedly. "You give us excellent instructions, as if you did not intend to make one of the party. We ran the risk last time; it is nothing more than fair that two others should take the chances on this occasion."

"Moreover, you are so well acquainted with that country," said Weston, "that, were you to go, the time might be saved which others would waste in searching for the track you have just described."

"That is true, very true, in many respects," rejoined Rowson, smiling; "but remember, young man, that Johnson and myself, as I said before, were last time exposed to more anxiety and peril than you two, who only went after the horses. However, let it be as you say. I volunteer to make one of the party sent after the horses. You may name my associate. I only do so on condition that I shall be expected to bring the animals no further than the Mamell—that is, to the ridge which divides the waters of the Mamell from those of the Fourche-la-Fave. There, near the source of the creek, or salt-pool, we will meet; and thence the other two may take the horses to the island."

"It would be better for you and Johnson to undertake the former portion of the job, then Weston and myself can see the horses safe to their destination."

"Stop," interrupted Johnson, "I cannot volunteer to go upon that rascally Husfield's land. You are not, perhaps, aware that we quarrelled a fortnight ago, on which occasion I —— Why, the pistol missed fire, and he knocked me

down. I owe him something for that," he added, quivering with rage. "I do not wish to settle that matter on his own ground; were I to do so, it might go against me in a court of justice. No, let chance decide who is to go; we can draw lots with straws."

"Straws; nonsense," ejaculated Cotton; "let the issues of the chase decide that matter. To-morrow morning we will all four—or, at any rate, three of us, since Rowson volunteers to go, at all events—start in different directions to hunt. We will meet again here on Tuesday morning, and he who has killed the greatest number of deer, or bagged the most game, shall be free."

"That," said Rowson, "is a capital idea. I shall make one, only for the fun of the thing."

"I don't mind," Johnson observed; "we are all good sportsmen, and luck must decide which of us has to undertake the most dangerous part of our scheme. Good-bye till to-morrow, then; but we have still to choose our hunting-grounds, that we may not cross one another's paths. For my own part, I will ascend the river a little, and beat up the plain."

"You will come in my way then," said Weston. "I *must* go in that direction, as I have been squatting there, and have left my things—my blanket, my cooking utensils, and two deer-skins."

"Then I will go towards the Petite-Jeanne. Jones, who lives on the other side, told me yesterday that he had seen lots of tracks."

"I shall follow in that direction too," said Rowson, "though I shall not be able to hunt all day, having promised to go to Mrs. Laughlin's in the evening, to hold a prayer-meeting."

"Where will you hide your rifle?" asked Johnson, with a smile.

"At Fulweal's, I should think," answered Rowson; "or I can leave it with Cotton's sister; when I am riding home in the evening I can call for it."

"Rowson, Rowson!" Cotton cried, threatening him good-humouredly with his fist; "affairs with that widow Fulweal do not seem quite right. You sneak about in that neighbourhood so much; and when, a short time since, I unex-

pectedly attended your meeting, you were both kneeling together suspiciously close."

"Nonsense," returned Rowson.

"When the young widow was inspired," continued Cotton, not to be diverted from his subject, "and began to jump, to cry, and to shout, she would not fall down in her ecstacy until she knew that she was close to you, and Mr. Rowson of course lifted her up in his arms. She really might have hurt herself. Oh, Rowson!"

"Nonsense," repeated Rowson, somewhat out of countenance. Turning quickly to Weston, he added: "Remember, young man, that the two skins you have now in your hut count for nothing."

"Of course," the latter replied; "fair play. To-morrow morning, as soon as it is light enough to distinguish the sight at the end of a rifle, the chase must commence."

"Now it is time to break up the conference," said Rowson, putting his hands in his pockets. "May we soon meet again."

"Stop, there is something else," cried Cotton, as Rowson was walking out of the thicket to which he had tied his horse; "we must not separate without coming to some understanding as to how we are to act in case those accursed Regulators come upon our tracks. If things turned out as I wish, not one of those rogues would be left alive to-morrow evening."

Rowson retraced his steps, and stood biting his nails at Cotton's side.

"I had nearly forgotten to communicate a piece of news to you," he said, after a short pause, casting a glance at his muscular friend; "Cotton's speaking of the Regulators reminds me of it."

"What is it?" asked Johnson, eagerly.

"Nothing more nor less than that the sheriff of Pulasky county holds a warrant against our friend Cotton, here."

"The devil!" exclaimed the latter. "A warrant! for what?"

"I do not know whether it is for anything in particular. There are several different matters. I heard whispers about a fifty-dollar note, a breach of promise of marriage in Randolph county, and an affair with reference to a man who has

been some time missing, and whose body was lately found. In fact, there are various little matters of the kind."

"Plague upon it!" said Cotton, stamping; "and this is the sort of thing you had nearly forgotten. You would have me go into the settlement quite unconcernedly. I see it is time for me to be off—Arkansas might become a little too hot for me. I am getting too well known about here."

"I dare say you have a very extensive circle of acquaintances," said Rowson, smiling maliciously.

"Very," replied the hunter, absently. "What does it matter, after all?" he continued, stretching himself suddenly. "In a few days our business will be finished, and, with my share of the spoil, I can go to the Mississippi, and thence proceed comfortably to Texas."

"Why not go from here overland? It wont cost you a cent, and is not so far."

"True enough; but I have my reasons for not wishing to come in contact with the Indians."

"I see, Cotton. Do tell us the story," said Weston. "I have heard so much talk about it, and should like to know what it means. What is there between you and the Cherokees?"

"This is not exactly the time for story-telling," replied the person addressed, surlily.

"People say," Rowson remarked, "that your arm still bears the marks of iron——"

"Cease your childish prattle. We have other things to think about now. The search is not after me only, but all of us. The Regulators have somehow got wind of our proceedings, and are watching every one of us."

"Not me," said Rowson. "None see a wolf in the pious Methodist preacher."

"None?" repeated Cotton, tauntingly. "None? Why, what did Heathcott say, when he called you a liar and a rascal?"

A shade passed over Rowson's countenance, the paleness of death replacing its former florid appearance, and he grasped his hidden knife spasmodically.

"What kind of accusations did he make?" the hunter whispered, stepping up to his companion, who still quivered

with rage. "You took it all quietly. Fie! I feel ashamed of you."

"Cotton," cried Rowson, restraining himself with difficulty, "you have touched the right chord. That fellow is dangerous to us. He has not only a suspicion as to whom I am, but has lately dropped some hints about Atkins."

"What! Atkins?—the man who never assisted in a robbery, and who spends his time quietly upon his own farm?"

"That very Atkins. Heaven only knows why he directs his attention that way; but it is true that he does so. I had good reason for taking the epithets 'liar' and 'rascal' quietly. If I, being a preacher, had fired up, and returned him his own coin——"

"He would have knocked you down," interrupted Cotton.

"It would have been a great blow to my pious reputation," said Rowson, continuing his sentence.

"Ay, a blow," rejoined Cotton, "on your skull, or between your eyes."

"Can't you leave off your chaff?" exclaimed Johnson. "We did not come here to listen to your tomfooleries. Rowson was quite right. If he is a preacher, let him behave like one."

"And steal horses," put in Cotton, with imperturbable gravity.

"Will you be serious, or not? I am sick of your talk," Rowson exclaimed, angrily. "We have assembled here to act in concert for a common object, and not to quarrel. I am well aware that the Regulators will meet hereabouts to-day or to-morrow."

"Hereabouts! Where?" exclaimed his companions, quickly, and all with one voice.

"At Roberts's, or at Wilkins's, or somewhere else; how can I tell? That they will meet is certain; and they intend to revive the Lynch-law, which is just now so much in favour."

"That's more than they dare do," cried Cotton. "Lynch-law has very recently been strictly prohibited."

"What will they not dare in Arkansas?" said Rowson, with a smile. "If twenty, or twenty-five of them, act together, with a firm determination, do you think the

governor would send soldiers against them? Certainly not; and even were he to make the attempt, it would be of no avail. They may do anything they please; and they wish to exterminate us, that their horses may come home safely at night, and that they may be no longer obliged to look after fellows who carry a bowie-knife, a pair of pistols, and a light bridle under their waistcoats."

"Viewing the affair in its proper light, one cannot blame them. Yet their anxiety on that score by no means agrees with our own ideas of life, and——What is the matter with that dog? he has been sniffing the air for several minutes. Can any one be approaching?"

"There is nothing the matter," said Cotton, glancing at the dog, which had again stretched itself out quietly. "He has perhaps caught scent of a turkey, but troubles himself no further about it."

"Their views then, I say, not agreeing with ours," continued Johnson, "we must defeat them either by force or cunning. As to using force, we are too weak for that; although many about here sympathise with us, few would stand by us in a serious struggle. I therefore think that with the aid of Atkins, who could not be better situated than he is for the purpose, we shall still be able to mislead them all; and though they have this stupidly proud Heathcott for a leader——"

"Heathcott their leader?" interrupted Rowson, startled.

"Yes; so at least Harper told me a short time since, when I met him at the mill."

"Then this must be the last lot of horses we take from these parts," murmured Rowson. "The game is getting too hazardous. I think we must draw the next lot from Missouri. Weston will have to be our guide in that country, and I know the neighbourhood about the Big-block and Farmington well enough."

"Are you also known there?" Cotton inquired.

"Certainly," replied the other, pretending not to perceive the malicious drift of the question; "I am known there too, and all the people thereabouts have a liking for me, on account of my pious mode of life."

"And the horses, too, have a liking for him," Weston observed. "When he left those parts, three of these good

animals followed him from purely disinterested attachment."

On this occasion, Rowson joined in the burst of merriment which greeted the observation, but soon grew serious again, and exclaimed in a loud tone of voice :—

"Gentlemen, this cannot go on any longer. Surely you do not consider that we are about to risk our necks, and that there is a season for everything, even for merriment as well as sober seriousness. Listen to my plan ; I have re-considered the matter. It will be best not to take the horses directly to the island, for it is just possible that, in spite of our dexterity, these fellows may keep upon our trail, and we should thus not only endanger ourselves, but also our friends at the island. It will be better for you to wait near Hoswell's canoe, about half a mile further up, at the spot where the Hurricane begins. I have discovered a good way, if we can once reach this place, of eluding pursuit and of remaining perfectly secure. I mean to throw them on a false scent, and that can only be done by making for the river. Of this we will speak more fully by-and-by; in the first place we must see who gets off by his success in the chase to-morrow, and with the man pointed out by chance as my confederate I will consult further."

"What shall we do in case they follow us to Atkins's, and thus discover our last retreat?" Cotton inquired, distrustfully.

"Perhaps there may be no necessity for going to Atkins's at all," answered Rowson. "I have lived long enough in the woods to know how to draw a few yelping curs off a trail. When it is once decided who is to be my associate, let the others repair to the appointed place, and my name's not Rowson if I do not make my promises good."

"That's a bold speech," said Cotton, laughing ; "in a few weeks you would perhaps give anything to be called by another name. At any rate, I have this consolation, that I do not run a greater risk than the others. Now let us take the oath not to betray our confederates in case of being captured. He is a scoundrel who would, even by a glance or a whisper, be false to his associates ; and may vengeance reach such a one wherever he takes refuge, ay, be it in the arms of his mother!"

"A violent death to him who proves a traitor!" exclaimed

Weston, drawing his large knife; "and may his arm and his tongue shrivel up, and may his sight fail him!"

"That's a strong oath," said Johnson, "but I am quite agreeable to take it."

"And I too," added Rowson; "but I hope no oath is required to bind us firmly together. Our own interest, which is a surer guarantee than oaths, will do that. If this should one day fail, I can only hope that when it does I may be in Texas."

"You do not mean that it is possible that any of us can prove so recreant as to betray his friends?" interrupted Weston, with warmth; "the very idea is treason and breach of confidence."

"Well, well, I will trust to your fidelity, Weston," said Rowson, stretching out his hand to him; "but you are still young, very young, and do not know in what straits a man may find himself."

"No torture shall force an answer from me which ——"

"I am glad that you think so; but now good-bye, gentlemen—farewell, Johnson. Where shall we meet to-morrow morning for the chase?"

"At the spot where Setter's-creek issues from the hills; near a slight elevation you will see a clump of walnut trees."

"I know the spot."

"In that case, be punctual; mind what you are about until we meet again; and do not come it too strong to your poor deluded followers."

"Nor to the widow," exclaimed Cotton.

Rowson did not hear the remark; he had disappeared in the thicket by which their open place of meeting was surrounded. The branches closed again as he pushed through them, and Cotton gazed after him for some moments. At last he shouldered his rifle without saying another word, and was about to follow in the same direction, when Johnson said, looking steadfastly at him, "You do not put much confidence in Rowson!"

Cotton stopped short, regarded his comrade earnestly for some seconds, and replied, pointedly—"No, candidly speaking, I do not. His sly ways, his ever friendly smirk, even after the greatest insults, cannot inspire confidence. The fellow hates Heathcott like sin—stop! that simile is ill-

chosen—like virtue, I should rather say; and yet I witnessed a reconciliation between them. Rowson went to Heathcott, shook hands with him, and assured him that he bore him no ill-will. I would have been cut to pieces before I would have done the same kind of thing. The fellow should have felt the touch of my knife instead of that of my hand. However, in this affair his own interest is concerned, and, therefore, I hope he will be faithful. It certainly could do him no good to betray us, for a price has not yet been set upon my head. Ha! ha! ha! ha! Do those quill-drivers fancy they can catch Cotton in the wood? it would be a difficult matter, and is only to be effected by means of treason."

"You have too bad an opinion of Rowson," Johnson remarked, in a conciliatory manner; "of course he has his failings, like the rest of us, but, nevertheless, he is trustworthy; and I am firmly convinced that the Regulators might flay him alive, without getting him to reveal the name of one of his comrades."

"Be it so. In any case, it would still have to be proved that I made one of them," said Cotton, laughing; "but good-bye, Johnson; you mean well, I am convinced, and one may rely upon you in the worst extremity—good-bye! The day after to-morrow we shall meet here again, and if we have but a few hundred dollars in our pockets, life will be better and more secure. There are many among the settlers here who now open their mouths very wide, denouncing robbery and crime, whose lips might be closed by a five-dollar note, and they would only open them again with the blandest of smiles. But good-bye; time presses; to our speedy and successful meeting!"

Thereupon the men separated, Cotton and Weston going together towards the bank of the river, while Johnson bent his steps directly northwards through the brushwood. He crossed the roughly-constructed main track through the forest, and disappeared among the steep pine-clad hills.

The place of meeting selected by the horse-dealers, as they called themselves, was quiet and solitary. For about a quarter of an hour after the departure of the men whose conversation we have just related, its stillness was disturbed only by the gambols of the squirrels and the harsh cry of the jay, when the bushes suddenly re-opened, dividing with-

out the slightest noise, and the dark figure of an Indian appeared upon the spot. He listened cautiously in every direction before crossing the open space, like a deer issuing from the depths of the forest, which, before springing over a track, gazes right and left, to see that no danger is near. Then, with a stealthy step, he turned as if about to depart, his eyes being fixed upon the ground, when suddenly his attention seemed to be attracted by the great number of footprints, and he narrowly examined the spot. He looked in particular at the place on which the dog had been reclining. He then went round the clearing, taking a larger circuit, as if engaged in counting the tracks that led from it.

The red-skin had a powerful, noble form. The thin, many-coloured cotton shirt, which covered the upper part of his body, rent in many places from having come in contact with thorns, did not altogether conceal his broad shoulders and muscular arms. This garment was fastened round the body by a leathern belt, in which was stuck a small, sharp tomahawk, and, according to the fashion of the white men, a large knife. His legs were cased in dark leathern gaiters. Round his neck he wore a kind of badge, cut in the shape of a shield, on which a red-deer was engraved in a simple yet not unskilful manner. No other ornaments decorated his person; and even the pouch which hung at his right side had none of those glass beads and coloured leather strings with which the aborigines so much like to adorn them. His head was uncovered, and his long black glossy hair hung down in tresses, reaching from his temples to his shoulders. His weapon was the common American rifle.

He prosecuted his search for some minutes, and then stood erect, pushed his hair back from his forehead, cast another scrutinising glance around, and disappeared in the thicket on the opposite side to that from which he had at first emerged.

CHAPTER II.

SEVERAL NEW ACTORS APPEAR UPON THE SCENE—THE WONDERFUL SPORTING ADVENTURE OF THE "LITTLE MAN."

On the same morning in which the events recounted in the former chapter occurred, two horsemen might have been seen riding along the county road, scarcely five hundred paces from the thicket mentioned in our last. They evidently belonged to the better class of farmers. How much soever they might differ in outward appearance, they seemed in all other respects to agree remarkably well. The young thin man, on his brown fiery pony, which could with difficulty be kept at the slow pace at which they were travelling, often laughed heartily at the remarks and jokes of his short stout companion. The latter was about forty years of age, with a very full and florid face, the kindest expression imaginable being stamped upon his features. His round portly form corresponded with his physiognomy in the most pleasing manner, and his little sparkling grey eyes beamed as joyfully and good-humouredly upon the world as if their owner meant to say, "I am uncommonly merry, and could not possibly be more so."

From top to toe, with the exception of the well-blacked shoes upon his feet, he was attired in snow-white cotton, and had he been offered the world itself, he could not have made the ends of his jacket meet. The garment had either become so tight from frequent washing, or, what is more likely, his round body had increased very much in size, and grown, as he himself described it, more alderman-like. A yellow straw hat shaded his face, and a thin neckerchief of the same colour fastened his open collar, between the ends of which his neck was visible. Not without a proud, or, at any rate, an attempt at vain display, a bright red pocket-handkerchief peeped out from the pockets of his trousers, which were certainly capacious enough to hide half-a-dozen such articles. His companion was a tall young man, with a bold and open expression of face, and dark fiery eyes. His dress was like that generally worn by the farmers in the west of America, consisting of a

blue cloth coat, trousers of the same material, and a black striped waistcoat. He had no shoes upon his feet, but, in accordance with the Indian fashion, nicely yet simply-worked mocassins. This, with his not unsteady yet scrutinizing glance, showed that he was a sportsman, although he had at the time no weapon, being, like his companion, unarmed. His head was covered by a black beaver hat, much the worse for wear, and in his hand he carried a heavy leather riding-whip.

"My brother is a wonderful fellow," said the little man, in continuation of an account he had commenced of the strange adventures of his elder brother, then living in Cincinnati. "He had a mania for buying old things which rose to an almost incredible height. When I was there last autumn, his good wife complained to me about it. The house was full of old furniture, crockery-ware, in fact all kinds of articles, of the tenth part of which he could not possibly make use; and in spite of this, he used to go every evening round the auction-rooms buying up anything which he considered a bargain that fell in his way. Once purchased, he thought no more of the things. I one day advised my sister-in-law to send a portion of the lumber secretly to the auction-rooms, to let it be sold for what it would fetch, and to put the money by, in case she should ever want it. She approved of the plan, and I got a cart, and in the afternoon, when my brother was engaged, I sent the whole lot down to Front-street, and before dark had finished the job. My sister-in-law felt quite delighted, and, on her husband's return in an excellent humour at about half-past ten, his usual hour, she made a good bowl of punch,—that reminds me we must one day or other brew some punch here—one hardly ever gets any; the majority of the stupid folks in these parts belong to temperance societies; but—let me see, where did I leave off? Oh! I remember, I was speaking about the punch. Well, we sat discussing the tipple till eleven o'clock, and my brother related one laughable adventure after another, for he was a good hand at story-telling. I asked him several times what made him so merry, but could get no satisfactory answer. At six the next morning he started again, and what do you suppose he brought home in three carts? Nothing more nor less than the very lumber I had

sent away the evening before; not a single article had escaped him, and he kept on boasting of the wonderful bargain which he had made."

"That is not bad, uncle," said the young man, with a smile, casting a rapid glance at the speaker. "And you really think that I shall believe that?"

"Oh, you wicked lad, did I ever tell you an untruth? You know I never did. I tell you what it is, should I in future have occasion to speak to you about facts, you need not grin so. Do you hear?"

"But, dear uncle, you must not be angry with me on that account, I cannot help it. Whenever you begin a story, I enjoy the comical turn it is going to take by anticipation. It is sure to prove a merry one. This it is, perhaps, which sometimes causes me to laugh a little too soon."

"Comical! dear me, comical! I never tell comical stories. Did you ever hear me relate a comical story? I do not know anything that could be more serious than the last I told. My brother will ruin himself by this unfortunate failing of his."

"Your brother is said to be a very clever man of business, and though in this respect he seems, as you say, to be possessed by a strange fancy, he is sure to make up for it tenfold in other ways."

"A clever man of business! God bless you, my boy, there is not a smarter man of business to be met with anywhere; he is, in fact, too smart sometimes. I very well remember when we were hunting together in Kentucky, how he used to take the dealers in with old opossum skins. You know the dodge, and many a quart of whisky did we get in this manner. I must tell you of another trick which he played me at Cane Lake. We were rowing together in an old canoe, with the view of spearing fish, and shooting stags which came to drink at the edge of the lake. It happened to be uncommonly hot, and the sun scorched us terribly. In order to cool myself, I was going to take my hunting-shirt off; and just as I was in the act of putting down my powder-flask (a capital horn one, with a patent spring), my finger caught the string, and it fell into the lake. There I sat dismayed. The lake was clear as crystal, and, although it might be fifteen feet deep, I could see the flask at the bottom as plainly as

possible. George was always expert at leaping, swimming, and diving, and on perceiving my disappointment, which also affected him, as he had no powder left, and none was to be obtained in the neighbourhood, excepting at a very high price, he kindly offered to dive for it; and, without more ado, jumped overboard. On reaching the bottom, he found it rather muddy; he had stirred it up, and made the water thick, and he had to wait a moment while it got clear again. In the meantime I had taken off my hunting-shirt, and was sitting patiently in the canoe, when at last it suddenly struck me that my brother was remaining a very long while under the water, and, not without a certain feeling of alarm, I looked overboard. Now what do you think he was doing down at the bottom of the lake, eh?"

"I really cannot say what he could be doing in such a place, unless he was trying to get back again to the surface of the water as soon as possible."

"You are mistaken," the old man replied, reining in his pony, from the excitement of the moment, as if overcome by his reminiscences. "You are mistaken—he remained down there, as calmly as if he had been upon dry ground, in a stooping posture, that I might not perceive what he was doing. In spite of this, I saw what he was at but too well. The rogue was slyly pouring my powder into his own flask, and when he reappeared upon the surface, mine was half empty. Well, you need not laugh as if you were going to fall off your horse. Perhaps you don't believe this story any more than the last. Did your old uncle ever tell you a lie?"

"Don't be angry, uncle; I believe every word of it. Wait a moment;—do you see that red object out there—yonder, I mean—behind that fallen fir-tree—just between the mulberry-tree and the oak?"

"Where? Oh yes; it is a stag, sure enough. If Assowaum were here with his rifle, he might kill it easily enough. Under cover of these bushes, one might approach within fifty paces of it, or sixty at the most."

"I wonder where Assowaum can be!" said the young man, standing up in his stirrups, and looking back, as if he expected to see the Indian approaching. "He disappeared suddenly in the wood, and I thought that he had caught

sight of some game, but heaven knows what attracted him. What a splendid shot one might take from this!" he continued, in a lower tone. "I wish I had brought my rifle with me!"

"Mrs. Roberts would give you a cordial welcome if you made your appearance on the Sabbath with a gun. She will not even suffer the Indian to carry one on that day, although he can scarcely be persuaded to lay it aside. Look, that animal must either be quite tame, or it has not heard us!"

The two men, quietly continuing their ride, had now approached very near the stag, which stood in one of the numerous salt-pools that are to be found on both banks of the Fourche-la-Fave, but more especially upon the northern one. The animal did not seem to suspect approaching danger. Once indeed it raised its head, and sniffed the air; but perhaps this was rather for respiration, than from dread of any peril. The two men perceived that the stag was busily engaged in licking an orifice in the clayey bank of the brook, which had been made larger from frequent attempts of the kind by horses, cows, and stags. For several seconds the animal remained in one posture, occasionally brushing off with its tail the swarms of flies that kept annoying it. Then it again bent down to enjoy the salt taste of the fat soil. The stag had only recently got its new antlers, and these, hardly four inches long, did not offer much obstruction to its explorations. With its head gracefully bent on one side, it thrust its tongue as far as possible into the orifice to get at the saltest portions of the soil.

"I wish the Indian would come, Bill," said Harper in a whisper, with true sportsman-like animation; he added, "I believe one might get within five paces of that silly thing. It does not scent at all. Oh, Bill, you should have seen how I could creep when I was young. I once went——"

"If you get behind that hickory stump, I believe it might be done," whispered the young man.

"Nonsense, boy; do you think I mean to crawl about on my old bones on a Sunday morning in order to frighten innocent animals? I do not intend doing anything of the kind."

In spite of this assurance, Harper dismounted, and his

pony stood motionless, as if aware of what was going on. The short stout man, in his white dress, might have been seen gliding along upon his toes, his face getting redder and redder as he endeavoured to screen himself from the view of the animal behind the trunk of a large hickory tree. His sole object in thus acting must have been that of hoping to enjoy the sudden bound with which the stag might be expected to dash off, on perceiving its danger. The animal did not, however, get scent of its pursuers, the wind being in an opposite direction. It again raised its head, stretched its body, and then continued its meal. William Brown, or Bill, as his uncle called him, began to feel interested in the affair. Sitting quite still, that he might not make the slightest noise, he watched with intense satisfaction his uncle's progress, who had, as we before said, reached the hickory stump, within ten paces of the stag. Here he halted a minute, looking back at his nephew, at the same time making a comical grimace, as if he meant to say, "Don't you wish you may get it!"

The old man seemed to hesitate; for he was either amazed at the immobility of the young animal, or afraid to proceed further in his clean shoes, for at this point the salt-pool commenced, and a little stream ran over the soft clayey soil, which had been trodden by the different animals that frequented it, into a kind of adhesive paste. At length his innate love of sport overcame every other consideration; for the first time, the idea of the possibility of capturing the animal entered his head, and without further hesitation, though with all imaginable caution, he stepped into the soft soil. Then he plunged recklessly into the mud, with his highly-polished Sunday shoes, which were soon covered. Brown raised himself in his stirrups, looking on with almost breathless attention, and the old man's heart beat, as he afterwards declared again and again, so violently, that he was afraid lest the stag should hear it. Suddenly the animal raised its head, startled at the approach of the white form, and before it could move a single muscle, Harper, forgetting Sunday and Sunday clothes, sprang forward and seized it by the haunches. At that very moment the animal started up, to escape at a bound its peril. It was, however, too late; the old man held his prey with an iron

grasp. In its desperate efforts to free itself, the stag dragged Harper along through the mud. In vain, as far as his short thick neck admitted, did the latter attempt to raise his head, in order to keep it out of the mud-bath. The dirt splashed about in all directions, as he, like a vessel just launched, splashed into it, rising again immediately to the surface.

"Hold hard!" cried Brown, shouting, and uttering his usual hunting-cry. "Hold hard, uncle! Hurrah for the old boy! that's what I call sport."

The old man required no additional incitement, for little did he think of letting go his hold, after having soiled not only all his Sunday toggery, but also his person. He could not call for assistance, for had he, under the circumstances, attempted to open his mouth, it might have led to very disagreeable consequences. Doubtless a strong expression of determination settled upon his features, as he was being dragged upon his back through the salt-pool; but they were so completely covered with his mother earth, that it could not be perceived.

Brown rushed forward to the rescue, but the aspect of affairs was so ludicrous, that he tumbled down near the salt-pool in a violent fit of laughter. Large tears rolled down his cheeks, and for a minute or two he could not utter a word. As he was getting up again, he heard the report of a gun. Thereupon, the stag sprang forward for the last time, in agony, and, striking out from the old man's grasp, fell in a dying state into the mud.

Harper also heard the report of the gun, and rising, exclaimed, quite exasperated, "Who fired?" Being unable to open his eyes, he turned in quite the wrong direction, thereby provoking another violent fit of laughter in Brown.

The individual who had fired the shot did not keep them long in suspense. It was no other than the Indian, and as he stepped out of a sassafras thicket he caught sight of the strange figure cut by the respectable farmer, who was standing with extended palms and closed eyes. This was too much for Assowaum, and he uttered, in comical admiration, a loud "Waugh!"

"Bill, Bill—you confounded rascal—Bill, come here, and lead me to the spring. Hang it! am I to remain here all

day long, until the mud gets so hard that nobody can scrape it off? Bill, I say, you rogue,—do you mean to desert your old uncle in such a mess?"

Bill, as he was called, walked about some seconds before he could recover himself, then crossed over to the further end of the muddy spot, and held out a stick to the old man, which the latter grasped quickly, and was conducted by his obsequious nephew to the brook, where he first of all washed his eyes, that he might see what was going on. The first thing which met his glance was the figure of the Indian, who, without changing his expression, was busily engaged loading his rifle again.

"So, Master Redskin," said Harper, "you think that I am to crawl about in the mud, on a Sunday morning, holding stags, until you choose to come up and shoot them at your leisure, eh? If I manage to catch a stag, at the risk of my life, do you consider that you have a right to shoot it? Why don't you go to my farm, and shoot my cows and pigs as well?"

"We shall be too late for the prayer-meeting, uncle," Brown observed, quietly.

"Do you think I can go to the prayer-meeting in such a plight?" cried Harper. "No. I shall just tell the Redskin a bit of my mind. Is it right to steal up, Indian fashion, to a gentleman, and to shoot the game which he has already secured?"

"You could not have held the stag two seconds longer," modestly hinted Brown.

"What do you know about it, greenhorn? How can you tell how long I could have held it? Why, there is my brother; he once held a bear a whole night——"

"You did not mean to capture the stag alive?" his nephew said, interrupting his speech, not without reason, dreading lest his uncle should plunge into one of his long yarns.

"And why not? Is not my fence high enough to keep in a whole herd of stags? And, besides, can it concern that Redskin what I mean to do with my property? Well, what are you grinning at, eh?"

The Indian, the cause of all these angry words, said nothing in reply, being quietly engaged loading his rifle, which he first carefully wiped. His features relaxed into a

broad, good-natured grin, disclosing two rows of pearl-white teeth, and he replied in broken English:—

"Father is very strong; but the stag is quick, and if he once got out of the white man's hands, he would not leave the print of his steps again in the smooth soil of Fourche-la-Fave. My father wanted venison!"

"The devil take your father!" murmured Harper; "if I am indebted to any one for the venison, it is myself." Having said this, he stretched out his brawny arms, and turned to his nephew. Growing more friendly at the remembrance of his act of heroism, he added: "Well, my boy, that's a feat not to be easily imitated. For all that, it is lucky that you both witnessed it, for the deuce take me if Roberts and the rest would believe a single word about it, had I not your evidence to back my story. They are a wretched lot; as if I ever told them a lie. They will laugh, grin, and make signs at each other, as much as to say, 'That's another good one of his;'—but now I must wash myself, or the mud will dry upon me."

"We shall be too late for the meeting," said Brown, looking impatiently at the sun.

"What do I care now about hearing that sneaking fellow Rowson preach? I could do it quite as well myself; and as for his piety——"

"Do you mean to ride back home first, then?" asked Brown.

"Of course I do," replied Harper; "so ride on, I shall be in time yet."

"What is to be done with the venison?" Brown demanded.

"What is to be done with the venison, Mr. Malapert? That is easily settled. It will be carried on my pony into my kitchen. I should think I had purchased it dearly enough. That is right, Assowaum," he continued, turning to the Indian, who was dragging the game by its short antlers down to the brook, in order to wash off the thick clay with which it was besmeared. "Clean it, so that an honest man may with decency put it upon his horse. But, halloa! what is that Mr. Scalping-knife doing—what the deuce are you up to?" This exclamation was caused by his seeing the Indian, who with the greatest coolness had begun to cut

the animal up, having already nearly severed one haunch from the carcass. "I do not wish to have it skinned: do you hear me? The fellow is deaf, surely!"

Assowaum was not to be diverted from his object, but very coolly removed a haunch from the animal, and, attaching it by a slip of hickory bark, threw it over his shoulder. He replied: "The white man dwells alone in his wigwam, and Assowaum is hungry."

"I don't care if you take half of the animal; but you are splashing me all over with blood," exclaimed Harper.

"That is better than mud," answered the Indian, laconically, shouldering his rifle and making for the road, leaving the two men in charge of the game.

Brown assisted his uncle to get the stag on his pony. This accomplished, the old man sprang into the saddle, and in the best possible humour adjured his nephew not to relate the story at Roberts's before he got there, as he only had to ride home and change his dress, which would not detain him long. Brown gave the required pledge, and trotted quickly after the Indian, who had already got some distance in advance.

CHAPTER III.

THE INDIAN AND THE METHODIST—THE INVITATION TO THE WEDDING.

Assowaum, or the Feathered Arrow, belonged to one of the northern tribes of the Missouri. When game became scarcer, on account of an increasing population, in the hunting-grounds of his tribe, he formed an acquaintance with the two white men, Harper and Brown, and wandered to the south. It is not long since the Fourche-la-Fave hunting-ground enjoyed the reputation of being the richest in game of any portion of the United States. Yet he had not quitted his tribe solely on this account; he had been forced to flee from the vengeance of his enemies, having slain a chief, who, intoxicated by the fire-water of the Europeans, had attacked his squaw. Her cries for aid brought a saviour

and an avenger. With her he had now raised a small wigwam, not far from Harper's dwelling. He lived by the chase, and his wife plaited, from the thin reeds that grow in the plains of the south, pretty baskets, and made small mats from the elastic bark of the papao-tree. These Assowaum carried with his skins down the river to Little-rock, where he exchanged them with the traders of the rising town for powder and lead, or other necessaries of his hunting life; sometimes obtaining cash for them. His wife had been converted to Christianity by the Methodist preacher, or, as he was called, circuit-rider, for he preached in all the settlements of this county, as well as in those of the neighbouring one. But upon Assowaum himself all attempts were fruitless; and Rowson vainly endeavoured to convert this hardened sinner, as he called him, from the belief of his fathers to the "only true" faith of the Methodists. The Indian persisted in wishing to die in the former, and was not to be shaken in his determination by the threats and exhortations of the fanatical preacher.

Alapaha, Assowaum's squaw, had early in the morning bent her steps to the white men's settlement, to hear the minister preach; and Assowaum now followed in that direction, partly with a view of seeing her home, and partly for the purpose of fetching a number of otter skins, which he had obtained by the chase a few weeks before in that part of the country, and deposited at Roberts's house. The majority of the settlers entertained friendly feelings towards the two Indians, for they led a steady, sober kind of life, and were willing to render any one a service whenever the opportunity for so doing presented itself. In spite of this the man was more serious and reserved than his wife, who played with the children, and never seemed to tire of their frolicksome gambols.

"Did you ever see such a figure as my uncle cut just now?" said the young man, laughing, when he had overtaken the Indian.

"He looked like a marsh-tortoise," said the Indian, "only much dirtier. The old man will tell a pretty story, when he gets into the huts of his friends."

"Let him alone for that," replied Brown. "It is strange enough, though, how he managed to keep hold of the animal

so long. I could not have believed it myself, had I not seen it with my own eyes."

"Kahween shaughweewee-see*—his bones are of iron," answered Assowaum; "but the stag, too, is strong; and if Assowaum had arrived a moment later, he would have found nothing in the pool but the little man."

"Possibly," rejoined Brown; "but he will never admit that, and he is sure to maintain that he could have held the stag all night."

"The old man uses stout words," said the Indian.

"Do you know old Bahrens, who built a small house, a short time since, at the Petite-Jeanne?" asked Brown.

The savage smiled, and winked at his companion.

"Did you ever speak to him?" asked Brown.

"He was telling of his sport at the Bay-de-View and at the Cash River. He said that he shot nineteen stags in one day, and the smallest skin weighed eleven pounds, when dry, without the pelt."†

"Oh, he is famous at such tales; I should like to see uncle and Bahrens together for once," said Brown.

"So should I," returned Assowaum, who seemed to enjoy the idea immensely.

The two men pursued their way along the broad road for several miles, without exchanging another word or meeting anybody. All at once the monotonous and shrill sounds of a Methodist hymn were heard in the distance. The Indian listened for some seconds with marked attention, then, resuming his former easy gait, he said: "The pale man (that was the name by which he called Rowson, on account of his cadaverous countenance) has a loud voice. He is like a young wolf—let the old ones howl ever so loud, you still hear his voice above them."

"You do not like the preacher, Assowaum."

"No; Alapaha loved the Great Spirit; she prayed to Manitou, who had protected her fathers. She was an obedient squaw; she never crossed Assowaum's path when he went hunting; and when, in the first dark night after seed-

* He is not weak.

† This is the thin, fleshy part of the skin, which the Americans generally take off with the skin, and leave on it, in order that the whole may weigh more, as it is paid for by the pound.

time, she drew her matchecota round the mondamie-field, vermin and wild beasts kept away, and the field was blessed.* Alapaha now laughs at the Great Spirit to whom Assowaum prays, and the animals shun his path when he goes into the wood."

The Indian did not seem disposed for further conversation, but quietly and rapidly continued his journey, until they reached the outer fence of Roberts's farm. From this a broad path, going between two fields of maize, led to the principal building, from which the singing they had heard before now resounded clearly and distinctly. William Brown had no sooner reached the farm, than he threw the reins over a stake in the fence, and walked into the room in which the people had assembled. The hymn was just ended, and all the congregation were kneeling, with their backs to the preacher, leaning upon their chairs; while Rowson, whom we met under such very different circumstances in the wood, was standing up in the midst of them, delivering, with his eyes closed and in a sharp, shrill voice, a long prayer, in which he dwelt upon the appalling sinfulness of those present, and implored, not the punishment which they so richly deserved, but mercy.

Brown belonged to another sect, who would not consent to kneel, even to God; so with folded hands, listening with pious attention, he stood on the threshold, but would not approach nearer, and in vain did Rowson make signs to him to take a place at his side. He did not seem to pay any heed to them, but kept his eyes fixed upon the ground. At length the preacher concluded his prayer, and the congregation rose to depart. The service was now over, and Brown greeted several of the young girls present, with whom he was acquainted, and who had assembled from different parts of the neighbourhood.

"You come very late, Mr. Brown," said Marion Roberts, the lovely young daughter of old Mr. Roberts, and for the last six months the affianced bride of the pious preacher, Rowson.

* *Matchecota*, a kind of upper garment. Dragging it along the field is a custom prevalent among the northern tribes, who fancy that it will bring fertility and drive away wild beasts. *Mondamie* is a kind of maize.

"Did you miss me? if you did, I should indeed be sorry that I lost a great part of the service," answered Brown.

"That is not proper, Mr. Brown," replied the young lady; "I have too good an opinion of you to believe that you attend this sacred service from other motives."

"I am not a Methodist," Brown rejoined.

"Does that matter? Are we not all Christians?" said Miss Roberts.

"Your future husband holds different opinions on that point," answered Brown, laying a particular stress upon *future husband*, and looking inquiringly into the eyes of the pretty girl, who avoided his glance, and replied :—

"He may be occasionally too strict in his views. I am, for my part, more tolerant in this respect, and so is father. It is true that mother is stricter; in fact, she and Mr. Rowson agree very well in general."

"Upon this occasion it was not my fault that I arrived too late," said Brown; "I started early enough, but my uncle met with an accident, which delayed him, and he was compelled to return home."

"I hope he was not taken ill?" said Marion, quickly, and with some anxiety.

"I thank you very much for the interest you take in him," answered Brown; "the old gentleman will be proud to hear of it; he thinks *very* highly of you."

Marion blushed at the recollection of the eager manner in which she had put the question, and said, anxious to change the tone of the conversation, "Why did he not accompany you?"

"He met with an adventure," answered Brown, smiling, "of which I am forbidden to speak, as he intends relating it himself. You know his passion for story-telling."

"I enjoy it by anticipation," exclaimed Marion, clapping her hands; "that will be splendid."

"May I ask what will be splendid?" inquired Rowson, advancing, and greeting the young farmer in a friendly manner.

"It is a laughable adventure which has befallen my uncle, or rather an act of heroism which he performed, and——"

"Were you yourself a witness of it?" asked Marion, smiling; "you know your good uncle——"

"But, Marion," observed Rowson, in a serious tone, "is it right, so soon after service, to be occupied with worldly and profane subjects? Your mother would be very much hurt were she to know it."

"Mr. Rowson," said Brown, annoyed at hearing a reprimand which brought the blood into the young girl's cheeks, "you are Miss Roberts's intended husband, and the preacher of the county, and thus doubly entitled to exercise some control over the young lady; but I should think that an innocent joke and a merry word could not be displeasing to God. There is a season for everything. Let us be serious while prayers are going on, and merry in society."

Rowson would certainly have said something in return, had not old Roberts at that moment joined the group.

Shaking young Brown by the hand very heartily, he exclaimed, "That's right, my boy, so you have come to see us at last. The——"

The old man would very probably have finished his speech in a manner not by any means appropriate for the day, had he not caught, at the right moment, the preacher's eye, which was fixed seriously and sternly upon him. Changing his tone, he continued, "For four weeks—but let me see; how long have you been in Arkansas?"

"Seven weeks," answered Brown.

"Well, then, for the last four we have only seen you twice, whereas, during the first three, you came here nearly every day. By my ——, it is not after all so very amusing in this solitary place that one can readily dispense with a good companion. There is Harper, he comes oftener; what has become of him to-day?"

"He will be here directly," said Brown.

"Brown," said Rowson, interrupting the conversation, "in case I should forget it, I invite you and your uncle to my wedding, which is to take place this day four weeks. You must come, as we cannot do without you, and as——"

"I must decline the honour," said Brown, sharply, turning away; "in four weeks I shall probably not be in Arkansas."

"Not in Arkansas! I thought your uncle had bought land intending to settle here."

"Such is my uncle's intention," answered Brown; "but I mean to join the volunteers who are going to Texas. I heard a few days ago in Little-rock that country wishes to free itself from the rule of Mexico, and for that purpose desires the aid of the Americans."

"Stuff!" exclaimed Roberts, grasping the young man's hand. "Let them fight their own battles in Texas, and do you remain with us. We are in want of brave men at Fourche-la-Fave, as a defence against the rogues that abound just now. At the wedding, all the young girls far and near will be assembled, and the ——, that is to say, it would be a very strange thing if you could not find one amongst them all to suit you. Don't be frightened," he continued, laughing, as he observed that Brown was shaking his head; "they are rather scattered, and a man like you, who visits no one, has, of course, no chance of seeing them. But, bless my soul, here comes Harper! Thunder and —— hem! How flushed he is!"

It was, indeed, the worthy man himself, approaching in a great hurry, half afraid that his nephew had told his adventure.

"So you managed to hold your tongue, boy," he cried, as he joined the group.

"I have not uttered a syllable," answered the young man.

"That is well," exclaimed Harper. "I had such a chase this morning, children."

"A chase, Mr. Harper!" said Mrs. Roberts, in a reproachful tone. For the lady of the house had just before come forward, and greeted the new arrivals in a friendly manner. "A chase, and on a Sunday?"

"Without a rifle, Mrs. Roberts, without a rifle; there was no harm in it. I must tell you the story from the beginning; one does not meet with such an adventure every day. William, remain where you are; you are my witness. Where is Assowaum?"

"He went into the field to the fire, probably to roast a piece of meat."

"He must come here, too, by-and-by. If I have no witnesses, nobody will believe my story—people ought to see

everything themselves—you should have heard my brother tell a story."

"Or old Bahrens," said Roberts, laughing.

"Bother that old Bahrens!" returned Harper; "I am always hearing about that fellow; I must go and see him some day: he really must be quite a curiosity."

"We shall go his way on Tuesday, in search of some pigs that have got loose," said Roberts; "you may join us if you like, Harper, and we will spend the night with Bahrens."

"Agreed," Harper exclaimed; "but now for my story."

Just as the little man was, with great self-satisfaction, relating to an attentive audience his strange adventure, Rowson, who did not think it became him to join in the general merriment, service having only been recently concluded, went by the back-door into the field, or rather the land which had been cleared; for as yet no corn had been sown, and all the felled trees had not been removed.

For the purpose of getting rid of the largest of these as quickly as possible, some of them being six feet in diameter, Roberts had ordered them to be burnt. Assowaum had turned the fire to account, and taken his station near some glowing embers, for the purpose of cooking the venison he had received from Harper. Alapaha having joined him, prepared, according to the Indian fashion, his meal. Reclining leisurely upon his blanket, inhaling and then puffing out the tobacco-smoke from a short wooden pipe of his own construction, the powerful child of the forest reposed near a large trunk of the oak, a symbol of his own race. Not long before, it had towered over the country as if it were a king, and now it lay upon the ground, so that the white intruder could not tell which was the best method for getting rid of it. As the fire consumed the trunk of the tree, so did the fire-water the stock of the Indians. At first slowly, and then with increasing power, it annihilated the beautiful, proud, and noble tree, leaving nothing but dust and ashes. The bones of the Indian warrior enrich the soil which the white man turns with his plough; and the rude stones on which they sat round their council-fires became the tombstones of their sunken and past glory.

Such were the ideas and comparisons that might have flashed across brave Assowaum's mind; for he, unlike

thousands of his race, had not been corrupted by the vices of the white men. He was gazing abstractedly at the dying embers, when his wife suddenly quitted her cooking and went towards the house. She had perceived the figure of the preacher approaching, and hastened to meet him. Rowson held out his hand to her, and breathed a long and pathetic prayer over her, during which the venison steaks kept hissing upon the embers and got sadly burnt.

Alapaha was one of those rare Indian beauties, in whom the distinctive marks of her race, not generally pleasing to the eye of the white man, were positively becoming. The prominence of her cheek-bones was lost in the fulness of her countenance, which beamed with health; her lips pouted voluptuously, and her black eyes were lighted up by a strange fire. Her ivory teeth excelled in pearly whiteness those of a negro woman, and her tall and well-shaped form was not altogether concealed by the close folds of a leathern tunic. Her finely-shaped feet were stuck in mocassins, her hair was fastened upon the crown of her head by a scarlet handkerchief, and glass coral beads ornamented her ears and her neck.

"Alapaha," cried Assowaum, in a serious though not angry tone of voice, "does the Great Spirit of the Christians teach you to neglect the duties which you owe to your husband and chief?"

Alapaha returned with rapid steps to her cooking, and Rowson approached the red warrior, who merely saluted him with a nod, and retained his comfortable and reclining posture.

"Do not be angry with your wife, brother Assowaum," said he to the Indian, kindly; "do not be angry with her for listening to the words of the Lord. She is concerned about the eternal welfare of her soul, and you should be the last person to interfere in such a matter."

"Assowaum is not angry, and he does not seek to interfere with the performance of her religious duties," answered the Indian; "but he is hungry, and the meat burns, and Alapaha is the red man's wife."

"I have long wished to have another opportunity," said Rowson, with a friendly glance, "of pointing out to you the blessings of our religion, but you always avoid me. May I improve the present opportunity?"

The Indian made no reply, but took the meat which Alapaha handed to him in a rudely-shaped wooden platter, and commenced his meal. The preacher reminded him of all those passages of Holy Writ which bear upon the sinfulness of men and the mercy of God. He laid particular stress upon the many miracles which Christ performed during his sojourn upon earth, until at last, for the salvation of man, He had died upon the cross. Rowson probably thought that, by dwelling upon these passages, he should best be able to make an impression upon the sensuous nature of the primitive child of the forest. The Indian quietly continued his meal, and, when he had finished, did not interrupt the speaker by a single syllable, nor even a glance. He listened attentively to every word, and Rowson, encouraged thereby, continued the more earnestly to enforce his views by illustrations, which he imagined—and he was not altogether wrong in his conclusions—would have the greatest effect upon his auditor.

"Has the pale man finished?" Assowaum asked, when Rowson paused.

"I have," replied the preacher. "What does my brother say in return?"

Assowaum threw off the blanket with which he had partly covered himself, stood erect, and approaching the speaker, said—"In the beginning, the Great Spirit, whom you call God, created the world. He then made men—the Indians; they did not come from beyond the sea. He covered the earth with a canopy, putting all mankind beneath it. All tribes were assembled there. One of these sent a young man to see how things went on above. He found everything very bright, and was pleased with its beauty. A stag ran past with an arrow sticking in its side. He followed it to the spot where it had fallen down and expired. There he beheld the tracks of many other animals, and soon met the man who had wounded the stag. It was the Creator himself; and He showed the man how to skin the stag, and how to cut the meat into pieces. The Great Spirit then told him to make a fire; but the Indian did not know how to do that, and the Great Spirit did it himself. Then he told the man to hang a piece of the meat upon a stick and cook it. Again the Indian was at a loss, and let one side of the meat burn, while the other remained quite raw."

Rowson made a gesture as if he wished to speak, but the stern glance of the Indian silenced him.

"After He had thus taught the red man to kill the deer, and to make use of its flesh and its skin, the Great Spirit called the others out of their hiding-place, and tribe after tribe appeared, and each elected a chief. God also made a good and an evil spirit: they were brothers. The former went out to do good, the latter to destroy his brother's works. He laid the land waste, caused poisonous weeds to grow, and did all kinds of mischief. The good wished to exterminate the bad, but not by force. He therefore proposed that they should run a race, and that the loser should yield. The bad consented, and——"

"Stop!" cried the Methodist, impetuously, as he rose from the stump on which he had been seated; "it is not fit that I should listen to such tales, especially on the Sabbath. Poor misguided heathen, it is your pernicious superstition which keeps you a prisoner in a cobweb of lies. Effect your escape——"

While the Methodist was pouring forth these sentences, the Indian remained silent, not offering the slightest interruption; but he fixed such a wild look upon the preacher, that the latter grew terrified, paused in his speech, and glanced timidly at the house, which was not far distant. Assowaum, however, restrained the fury which was raging in his bosom, and, merely regarding the preacher with a stern glance, said, in a firm though subdued tone of voice—

"I listened to you while you spoke to me of the chief who changed sticks into serpents, and brought water from the rock—of the fish which kept the man for days in his belly, and then cast him out again upon the land—of the prophet who rode in a chariot of fire into heaven—and of the other who was sacrificed and died, and returned to the earth alive. Assowaum believed everything; and now, when I tell you how the Great Spirit in this part of the world created his children, you call me a liar. Begone!" he continued, stretching out his arm towards the preacher, who seemed somewhat confounded; "the eye of the pale man looks only on the side where his own wigwam stands—everything else is black in his sight."

Without waiting for an answer, Assowaum went towards the house, leaving his squaw to bring his things after him.

In the meantime Harper had finished the narrative of his adventure, amid the laughter and sympathetic exclamations of his audience, who, as noon approached, dispersed to their different homes to dinner. Harper and Brown had been invited by old Mrs. Roberts, as their visits were so few and far between, to partake of the simple repast.

While preparations were being made, Roberts asked young Brown to go with him to the yard, where he kept his best horses. In them all his pride and ambition were centred. He would not admit that any one in the county had better animals; and anybody who attempted to make an exchange with old Roberts was sure to be the loser, for he was a first-rate judge of the noble animal.

Before the reader makes a closer acquaintance with the old man, it may not perhaps be amiss for him to learn a kind of an infirmity of speech into which he had recently fallen. He never could keep to the subject with which he commenced. Those who knew him well were, of course, familiar with this peculiarity of his, and always interrupting him at the right moment, brought him back to his first subject. If allowed to go on without check, he lost himself altogether, until he came to a dead stop, losing all recollection of what he had at first intended to say.

On reaching the yard, Roberts directed the young man's attention to the particular merits of the different animals—extolled one as a wonderful bargain, and another because it had cost him a great deal of money—told of the races another had won, and the number of minutes in which another had performed a certain distance. The old man was quite in his element, especially when Brown gave him to understand that he was in want of a horse, and wished to buy a strong and powerful animal, fit to carry him in the Texas war of independence.

"I can let you have one, Brown, that will just suit you," exclaimed the old man, with great glee, forgetting for the moment that he should lose the young man as a neighbour. "That chestnut horse there is a capital animal, and not to be easily killed. It is just as fresh at night as in the morning, and is only four years old.—But, what do you mean? Do you intend going to Texas? The deuce is in it if we can allow that. I like to sell a horse when I have a chance,

but the——" He looked round to see if his wife happened to be near to overhear his oaths, and continued:—"No, Brown, that won't do. Texas is a country in which no man can prosper. It is only fit for Indians; and what a set they are! I remember well enough when the Creek nation passed through here; maize was then two dollars a bushel, and one could not procure enough of it for them. Now maize is cheaper; and whoever brings any to Little-rock——"

"The quiet life here does not agree with me, and I must see the world a little," said Brown, interrupting the old man. "Afterwards I shall return, I think."

"From Texas, eh? Nobody returns from that part—at least, no honest fellow. All the rogues and scoundrels go there now, and the saying, 'Go to the devil!' is quite out of fashion. People have become more malicious, and think 'Go to Texas!' will do as well. Besides, the land is not better than ours. I have land in yonder cane-bottom which I would not sell for ten dollars the acre. It is good feeding for pigs. You must come next winter and see mine. I have bought a new breed from Atkins. Atkins let me have two, and I would have taken more, but his brother, a lawyer, in Poinsett county—— I never could understand how he finds business in Poinsett county——"

"Your house will be quiet enough soon," said Brown, who had been for some moments lost in thought. "Your son has left for Tennessee, and when Marion marries——"

"True enough, I shall find a change. Well, it is not my fault. I have argued against the marriage long enough. I do not know how it is, but I cannot bear these parsons. One of them, about two years ago, came——"

"He seems to be a decent, quiet kind of a man," said Brown.

"Quiet; oh yes, very quiet!" Roberts rejoined; "but, between ourselves, I do not think much of him, as a man. A short time ago, Heathcott spoke of him in a way for which, had I been in Rowson's place, I should have run a knife into him; but the parson said nothing. Heathcott, it is true, is a wild fellow. His father was one of those old Virginians, who, at the time of——"

"Did you not say the marriage will take place four weeks hence?" asked Brown.

"Yes, in four weeks," answered Roberts. "I told him that he should not have my daughter until he had purchased the land on which he dwells, and had made arrangements to keep a wife properly. Our wants here are not numerous, yet a little capital is required. Cash is scarce; and as for the banks——"

"I wonder how Rowson supports himself, for his preaching does not bring in anything," said Brown.

"Certainly not," replied Roberts; "but he has a small capital in Tennessee, eight or nine hundred dollars at least, so he told me. He expects part of it in three weeks, and then he shall have my consent. The girl's mother is quite enchanted with the connexion. I can have no particular objection, though I do not like the look of the man. It is strange what an impression outward appearance often makes. In Tennessee, where I used to live, and where my father had eighty acres of land, near the Wolf river—— By the bye, there is splendid land there, and in Memphis, hardly half a mile distant, a first-rate market for all produce. Let me see—how long did I live in Memphis? Ah, I remember, it was when the first steam-boat went by. What was its name? Wait a little—I shall soon remember. Oh yes, she was called the *New Orleans*. That must have been in 1811. Good heavens! how fast time passes!—1811! Then the war came, and we had to march down to Louisiana, but arrived too late—Old Hickory had thrashed the Britishers. A capital idea that was about the cotton-bails! I afterwards talked to one of those Kentucky boys, who had taken one hundred and fifty shots; and he gave me his word, that out of all of them not one had missed the man he aimed at. They are first-rate shots, the Kentuckians, and I remember, in 1815, during the frost, which cut off all our fruit—there has never been such a frost since—— But, Brown, what are you thinking about? You look very serious. Is anything the matter? What have I been talking about?"

"The matter with me?—nothing," Brown replied. "I have a slight headache. I really believe that I laughed too much at uncle's adventure this morning. I remember we were speaking about a horse."

"There will be time enough to talk of that by and by," answered Roberts. "But, hallo! who comes here? One

two, three, four, five, six men, all on horseback, and armed with rifles and bowie-knives, which will be a recommendation to my wife. Heathcott, and Mullins, and Smith, and Heinze! Lord bless us, these are the Regulators! There must be something in the wind in this neighbourhood, and we shall soon hear all about it."

The old man stepped quickly through the gate, while Brown followed slowly, anxious to greet the horsemen, who were now advancing along the road between the fields at a short trot.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REGULATORS—A QUARREL AND A FIGHT.

LYNCH-LAW—that is, the taking of the law into one's own hands, or the punishment of criminals by private individuals—had again become very common in Arkansas, and the laws to prevent it had been rendered more stringent: even heavy penalties had been attached to the formation of illegal juries; but this was of little use in a State with but scanty means of intercommunication, and in which the arm of justice could not reach further than the nearest settlements. Arkansas had at that time become the resort of bands of robbers, who had formerly carried on their depredations in Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi; and well might the settlers deem themselves authorized to wage war against the enemy who threatened to destroy the peace of their dwellings. But, like everything else, this had its bright and dark side. If, on the one hand, many a criminal had been brought suddenly and unexpectedly before his judges, and condemned to a just punishment without troubling a justice of the peace or a sheriff, so it sometimes happened that personal hatred and desire of vengeance swayed the minds of the multitude against innocent people, making them feel the power which was for the moment wielded by their enemies.

Thus, in White County, the Regulators one day tore an honest and industrious farmer from the bosom of his family,

bound him to a tree in the presence of his wife, who was luckily prevented from witnessing the most horrible part of the tragedy by a swoon, and, amid the wailings and tears of his children, whipped the unfortunate man in a terrible manner, in order to extort from him the avowal of a crime of which he was guiltless. It is true that he afterwards established his innocence and shot the leader of that band; but the fright had such an effect upon his wife, that she fell into a violent fever, and died a few months afterwards. It had also been rumoured that Heathcott formed one of the band of Regulators, and had been, in consequence, compelled to leave White County: he was certainly a wild and rough fellow, with whom nobody wished to have anything to do—a real Kentuckian, full of bravado and love of contention, though in other respects honest and brave. The rest of the band were chiefly composed of farmers from the neighbourhood, all of them being dressed in their hunting-shirts, and armed with rifles, bowie-knives, pistols, and tomahawks. Heathcott, in particular, bristled like a porcupine with weapons, fully bearing out the remark made by Roberts to Brown, that he looked like a privateer which carried its arms upon deck, eager to grapple with an assailant.

"Hallo, gentlemen!" exclaimed the old man, addressing the Regulators, "where do you come from, and where are you bound? Are the Indians abroad, that you come so fully equipped with knives and guns?"

"Indians—no," answered Heathcott; "but something much worse—the horse-stealers. Up there on the Arkansas, four animals have been taken from Judge Rowlove's, and the tracks run to the south-east; but the rain the night before has washed them out, and we could not tell whether they went towards the Hot Springs, or more to the east. In vain we yesterday searched the wood in every direction; all that could be done was to send Hostler down the river, and Bowitt to Hot-Spring County. We are just going to Wilkins' to consult upon the measures necessary to be taken for the future. Will any of you accompany us?"

"I had rather not," returned Roberts. "You young fellows can settle the matter amongst yourselves; my old bones are no longer accustomed to scour the woods."

"But you have a great number of horses, and who can tell

how soon these rascals may pay you a visit!" said Heathcott. "When that happens, you will apply to us for assistance."

"I can wait until it does happen," returned Roberts. "I do not think that my place is comfortably situated for them, or they would have paid me a visit before. It is really wonderful that they have spared me so long!"

"It almost looks suspicious," said Heathcott, with a grin.

"No, no," cried the old man, laughing good-humouredly; "I do not see that. Come in, gentlemen, and take some refreshment. Good-morning, Heinze," he continued; "good-morning, Mullins.—Hallo, Pelter! that is a fresh horse you are riding. I never saw him before. It is a beautiful animal."

"I think we will accept your invitation," Heathcott replied, dismounting, while the others followed his example. "Wilkins never has anything in the house, so it will be best to take the first chance that offers. Make no fuss; the horses can rest awhile here."

While this was passing, Brown had been engaged exchanging civilities with some of the Regulators, with whom he had formed an acquaintance during his short sojourn in the country. He walked with them towards the house, where a young negro girl was busily engaged baking maize-bread and roasting pork for the unexpected visitors.

"Ah!" said Heathcott, as he approached, "are you not inclined, Mr. Brown, to aid the good cause by arm and eye? There cannot be too many of us, since, with the law against us, we have thus to prove to the State how seriously we view the matter."

"I must beg to be excused," Brown replied. "In the first place, I am only a bird of passage, not even yet familiar with the woods and the general character of the country; and I must also sincerely confess that I do not exactly approve of the proceedings of the Regulators, which too often become irregular."

"Sir," broke in the Kentuckian, angrily, "you will perhaps allow that we are the best judges of what we want."

"Certainly, certainly," answered Brown, in a conciliatory manner; "I do not pretend to speak with authority on the subject, but I am master of my own actions."

"You gentlemen who are always flitting from one State

to another, are never to be relied upon," said Heathcott, casting an ominous glance at the young man : "one moment you are in Missouri, the next in Texas, and you have acquaintances and friends everywhere. You do not join us, perhaps, on account of your friends."

"Mr. Heathcott," answered Brown, seriously, though with great politeness, "I do not wish to understand your allusion. It cannot apply to me. As for my conduct, and my journeys from one State to another, I have no one but myself to account to for them."

The other farmers now joined in the conversation, and would not suffer Heathcott to say anything calculated to wound the feelings of the young man, as they all liked him, and rather feared than esteemed the leader of the Regulators.

"Come in, gentlemen, come in!" cried Roberts, standing at the porch; "you must take things as you find them. I have had something prepared, that you might not be compelled to wait till dinner-time. Sit down and help yourselves."

The men did not require a second invitation, but, having first greeted the females of the establishment, took their places without further ceremony, and without even laying aside the weapons which they carried. They were about to discuss the well-supplied meal, when Rowson, who had been standing at the fire, near Mrs. Roberts, stepped to the table, joined his hands, and commenced a prayer.

The greater number of the farmers being themselves Methodists, and the remainder respecting the custom of the house, put down the knives and forks, which they had already taken in hand, and behaved with becoming decency. Heathcott alone cast angry glances at the preacher, who, not seeming to observe them, quietly continued the performance of what he considered a duty.

Had it not been for the presence of the ladies, the anger of that rather uncivilized fellow would have burst forth on the occasion; but he restrained himself, or, at any rate, reserved his wrath for a more convenient opportunity, merely commencing his meal before the preacher had finished asking a blessing. We need scarcely say that his conduct pained Mrs. Roberts very much, and she sat down in her rocking

chair highly indignant, muttering some words about "wild and sinful men," which only reached the preacher's ears, who had resumed his place at her side, and immediately nodded approval.

"You do not happen to have such a thing as a drain of whisky in the house?" said Heathcott, after a short pause, wiping his mouth with the sleeve of his leathern hunting-shirt. "Over at Bowitt's we had such cursed hot stuff, that it almost burned my inside out."

"I keep no whisky," answered the lady, incensed both at the demand, and the terms in which it was couched. "Mrs. Bowitt would do much better if she did not keep such stuff in her house."

"That is just what I told her," answered Heathcott, laughing, either not understanding the old lady's meaning, or intentionally perverting it. "It is a regular shame. At the storekeeper's, on the Petite-Jeanne, she might get the best stuff in the world for a dollar the gallon—genuine Monongahela."

"I think Mr. Heathcott might perceive," said Rowson, mildly, "that a conversation about whisky is not particularly agreeable to Mrs. Roberts."

"Mr. Rowson had better attend to his own business," answered Heathcott, sharply.

"I have ordered some corn for the horses, gentlemen," exclaimed Roberts, returning from the stables with Harper and Brown.

"Thank you—thank you," cried Smith and Heinze, delighted at having an excuse for getting up, and putting an end to a conversation that could only lead to disagreeable consequences.

Smith loitered behind for a minute, while the others went out, and said, in a conciliatory tone, to Mrs. Roberts—

"You must not take offence, ma'am, at what he says. We had a sharp ride this morning, and Heathcott may have taken a little more than was necessary when he got to Bowitt's."

The old lady made no reply, but rocked herself more violently, while Rowson thanked the man for his friendly remark, and assured him that he bore Heathcott no grudge.

"He is a rash young man," he continued, "and does not mean so badly as one might infer from his words."

"I shall be much obliged to him not to honour my house again with his presence," Mrs. Roberts exclaimed at last. "I bring up my child piously, and do not wish her either to see a bad example in my own house, or——"

"Dear mamma!" said Marion.

"That pious people," the old lady continued, paying no heed to her daughter's ejaculatory interruption, "who preach the pure gospel, should be insulted under my roof. You may tell Mr. Heathcott so."

Mrs. Roberts once more rocked herself energetically, as if anxious to see how far she could go without losing her balance.

Smith, a quiet and peace-loving man, a Methodist himself, approved of what Mrs. Roberts had said too well to offer any remarks. He joined his companions outside, where some were sitting on chairs, others on stumps of trees and on water-troughs, talking of what concerned them most, the rapidly-increasing horse robberies.

"The rogues must have a receiver here in the county, otherwise I do not see how they could always manage to elude us," said Mullins.

"Yes; and it is a puzzle where they take the animals," cried Roberts. "A horse is not a bird, that can fly away without leaving a track."

"Only have patience," returned Heathcott—"a little patience; these matters will all come out in the end, and we shall catch the fellows when they least expect it; and then I'll be hanged if I spare one of their lives. It is a shame that capital punishment for horse-stealing was abolished last year in Arkansas. It was as good as telling people to help themselves. We wont allow it any longer."

"I do not know; it is a hard thing to take a human life for a horse," suggested Brown.

"Hard—the deuce!" cried Heathcott, making a deep gash in the bark of a tree with his knife. "Whoever steals my horse, steals a part of myself. I have just sold three, and have the money about me. It is, in a certain sense, all my fortune, with which I mean to settle. If the horses had

been stolen, all my future prospects would have been destroyed, and that would be worse than death itself. No mercy—death to the scoundrels! Let them see that we are in earnest, and those that we do not hang will soon get out of Arkansas."

"You seem to put small value upon a human life," observed Brown.

"I do," answered Heathcott, working away with his knife.

"Then you cannot set a very high price upon your own," said Harper, laughing; "otherwise you would not throw it into the scale against that of any rogue."

"High enough to give a taste of nine inches of cold steel to anybody who might be dangerous to me," said Heathcott, looking round the circle savagely. "This is a free country, and every one has his opinion; and I will be hanged if I don't hold mine, that is certain.—Hallo! there's Mr. Rowson again," he added, with a sneer, as he caught sight of the figure of the preacher, with his hat on, and prayer-book under the arm, emerging from the door; "and he is one of those sneaking fellows, too, who hang out the sheep's skin, and only occasionally give us a glimpse of the fox beneath."

Rowson turned to the negro lad, who was then just coming in, and requested him to bring his horse. Heathcott, incensed by the preacher's silence—for the latter acted as if he had not heard his remarks—jumped up and asked angrily—

"Well, Mr. Sanctimonious, I should think I was worth an answer, though I am but a sinner."

Before Rowson could utter a word in reply, Brown jumped up, grasped Heathcott by the collar, and pushed him violently into his seat, so that he fell back and cut himself. The rest rose suddenly, and the Kentuckian, seizing his knife, which had dropped from its place during his fall, sprang over the trunk of the tree, and was about to grapple with his opponent, when the latter, without moving an inch, drew a pistol.

Heathcott, who had not for a moment suspected that Brown was armed, stopped short, and was just going to take up his rifle, when the others seized him by the arm, declaring, with one voice, that they would not tolerate murder.

"Get away," cried Heathcott—"get away! let me get at

the scoundrel. This cries for blood; I must and will have his heart's blood—ay, the very eyes out of his head!"

"Let him go," Brown exclaimed, putting up his pistol, and drawing a knife similar to the one Heathcott held.—"let him go, and we shall soon see which is the best man!"

"For God's sake, Mr. Harper, do not allow such a horrible thing!" Marion exclaimed, rushing, pale as death, from the house, and taking hold of the old man with trembling hands. "That wicked Heathcott will kill him."

"Calm yourself, dear child," said Harper, soothingly, "and by all means return into the house; this is now no place for a young girl. If the bullet once rushes out of the gun, no one can tell where it will go."

"He will kill him!" cried the young woman.

"Whom? your intended? Oh no, the quarrel is with my nephew."

Marion covered her face with her handkerchief, and allowed Rowson, who had come to her aid, to lead her back sobbing into the house.

"Stand aside!" shouted Heathcott, greatly agitated. "Give me my rifle; I must shoot that dog!"

"Let him go," cried Brown, his warlike spirit kindling within him,—"let him go; he has enough knives about him for his defence. Stand back, men of Arkansas; do you mean to prevent a fair fight?"

"Well," said Mullins, "you may fight it out, but he shall not have the rifle. We wont allow murder. As for a fight, that is another thing."

The next moment Heathcott was released, and the men formed a circle round the two disputants. The Kentuckian, before so savage, seemed to quail under the calm and fearless gaze of his opponent; and though he grasped his knife firmly, and cast angry glances at Brown, yet he remained as if suddenly glued to the spot on which he stood, and did not offer to attack. A painful pause ensued; the men, almost breathless, stared at the disputants, while Marion, standing at the doorway, pale as death, gazed with fixed eyes at the circle they had formed, awaiting the upshot. Her emotion was indescribable, and she trembled violently, although her hands were folded over her breast.

Heathcott was in a painful situation. Evidently afraid

of his opponent's steel, and still more so of the sneers with which he knew that his comrades would greet his refusal of the challenge, he was undetermined how to act. At this moment friends interfered, and stepping between them, separated the combatants.

"Come, Heathcott," said Heinze, "you are both in the wrong, and it is a sin and a shame that two honest fellows should be allowed to hack each other while there are rogues enough abroad upon whom they might more reasonably vent their anger. Come, it is time to go, and it is very wrong to spoil the Sabbath of these people who have received us so kindly."

"That is the only thing that has kept me from chastising the greenhorn," said Heathcott. "But, never mind, I shall be even with you; and Heaven shield you if you come within reach of my gun!"

"Heathcott, Heathcott!" Mullins cried, in warning tones; "that is a bad and dangerous speech—a very dangerous speech."

"Let him talk," said Brown, scornfully putting up his knife; "let him boast; it is the only enjoyment he still has in life."

"Come, Bill," said Harper, leading him into the house against his will,—"come, Bill, let these men be off. You have now satisfied your honour, and I am glad that my sister's son knows how to behave so manfully; but you have done enough. Think of the women,—Marion has swooned."

"Marion in a swoon!" cried Brown, quickly, hastening towards the house. "But, I recollect," he continued, more cautiously and stopping suddenly, "her intended is with her; I did not think of that. She will soon recover."

The Regulators had in the meantime quitted the place, and Rowson also got ready to depart. Harper accepted Roberts's invitation to remain and assist in the proposed search for the pigs, as well as to visit old Bahrens, of whom he had heard so much.

Rowson uttered a long prayer before mounting his horse, partly to ask forgiveness for the desecration of the Sabbath, partly to return thanks that no blood had been spilt. Before getting into the saddle, he approached young Brown,

and said, "You took my part to-day, and I thank you; although that bad man may be plotting revenge, do not fear anything; Heaven will protect you—rely upon its aid."

"I thank you," replied Brown, cordially; "but I rely as much on the fellow's cowardice and my own strength. He will keep out of my way, I do not doubt, and I am not of a quarrelsome disposition, so it is not likely that we shall meet again."

CHAPTER V.

MARION AND BROWN.

Rowson rode off in order to preach at another settlement, and Marion reclined pale and exhausted in an arm-chair. A tear occasionally stole down her cheek, and fell upon her delicate hands, which rested closed upon her lap. A deep sorrow was depicted upon the calm features and in the compressed lips of the beautiful girl.

Harper, Roberts, and Brown sat in the chimney-place, where the negro girl was engaged lighting a fire, and Mrs. Roberts stood at her daughter's elbow, smoothing her dark brown hair.

"Come, child, weep no more," she said, in a soothing manner; "all has ended happily. Mr. Rowson cannot fall in the way of these men again, as he has gone in another direction. Take a turn in the open air, you will feel better; perhaps Mr. Brown will attend you in a short walk. You are very feverish. How flushed you are at this moment! Come, come, a great girl like you ought to be ashamed of these tears."

On hearing the last sentence, Marion hid her face in her mother's breast and sobbed aloud.

"Mr. Brown, will you take the silly child into the open air a little? I really wish Mr. Rowson could have remained with us to-day; but, of course, the service of man must give place to that of God," said Mrs. Roberts.

On perceiving that his assistance was required, Brown rose from his seat, approached the young lady rather bashfully, and offered his arm.

"That is right, my child," said her mother, "that is right; hold up your head, you will be better when you get into the open air; and I should advise you, Mr. Brown, to walk quickly, that she may have good exercise. God forgive these wicked people for raising such disturbances in our quiet abode."

Harper had in the meantime grown very meditative, and gazed abstractedly at the fire; while Roberts, who, having commenced a conversation bearing upon the recent dispute, had, in his usual manner, got back to the revolutionary war, was just going to relate an anecdote of Washington, when the two young people quitted the house, and walked silently and quietly along the broad track which skirted the river towards the other settlements.

The sun was verging towards the west, and the shadows of the gigantic trees fell across the road; tribes of merry parrots flew from tree to tree, making a great noise; grey squirrels sprang boldly from branch to branch, or nibbled some stored-up nuts, the husks of which dropped with a rustling noise through the leaves; and quietly and cautiously raising its beautiful head, a deer now and then crossed the road with its young, or remained standing for a minute looking right and left, then slowly disappearing in the thicket, as if conscious that those who approached were not enemies. Unbroken repose lay upon the landscape, and the lofty crowns of pines and oaks waved majestically in the south-east breeze.

"We are under great obligations to you, Mr. Brown," said Marion, breaking the silence, which was growing painful; "you nobly and bravely took Mr. Rowson's part, thus exposing yourself to great danger."

"Not so great as you seem to think, Miss," answered Brown, with hesitation; "the fellow is a coward, and was only trying to draw Mr. Rowson into a quarrel, because he —— because being a preacher he could not retaliate."

"You meant to say something else," Marion remarked; "speak out. You do not consider Mr. Rowson a brave man?"

"He is a preacher, Miss Roberts," returned Brown; "and would get a very bad name in the neighbourhood if he were to engage in quarrels."

"Not to engage in, but—— Never mind, you took his part," answered Marion. "I am very glad that you are such good friends. Where did you get acquainted?"

"Acquainted! friends!" returned Brown; "I hardly know anything of him. This is the first time we ever spoke."

"And you risked your life for him," Marion exclaimed, stopping short, and looking up at the young man's large blue eyes.

"I heard that he was engaged to you," answered Brown; "I saw you turn pale, and I am of a somewhat violent temper; anger got the better of me, and I may probably have been a little rasher than usual, but—— Dear me, Miss Roberts, you are ill again. Will you rest a moment on this stump?"

Marion allowed Brown to lead her to the trunk of one of the trees which had been cut down for the purpose of clearing a road, and had been rolled to the side, there to be destroyed by the slow but sure tooth of time.

Another long pause ensued, which was broken by Marion's asking, "You wish to leave us, Mr. Brown? Father was saying that you intended to join in the war for the independence of Texas."

"Yes, Miss Roberts, it will be better for me to occupy my mind thus. There are many things I should like to forget, and war affords the best means of so doing. I shall perhaps deal in horses in partnership with your father."

"You do not seem to be happy," the young girl remarked, timidly, looking earnestly at her companion. "You lived in Kentucky a long while."

"I left Kentucky with a light heart," returned Brown.

"And have you suffered so much in Arkansas?" replied Marion. "I am sorry to hear that. I always liked the place exceedingly."

"You will continue so to do. In a few weeks you will be united to the man of your choice; and if with a loving heart the desert is said to become a paradise, how much more may such be the case with the beautiful forests and the lovely climate of Arkansas. There are happy people in the world, and——"

"And whom do you reckon among them?" asked Marion,

"Rowson!" said the young man, startled at the boldness of his speech.

"The mosquitoes are very annoying about here," exclaimed Marion, rising quickly. "Let us go further on, Mr. Brown. We shall soon be obliged to return, for the sun is setting."

Again the couple walked for some minutes in silence.

"You live with your uncle, now, do you not, Mr. Brown?" Marion asked at length. "At least, mother told me so."

"Yes, Miss. We lead a bachelor kind of life; a rude mode of existence."

"Your uncle is a very nice man, always merry, always ready for fun, and there is something so honest and open in his look, that I liked him from the first moment I set eyes upon him. I never saw him in such a serious mood as this evening. You look very gloomy, to-night, too; it is all owing to those wicked people."

"Mr. Rowson intends settling in these parts. I heard him tell Mr. Roberts that he expected to receive a part of his fortune."

"Yes," whispered Marion. "Father wished it should be so. Indeed, father was altogether against this connexion."

"It is not right of your father to put himself in the way of his child's happiness."

"But he pretended that I should not be happy," answered Marion.

"Is not love the greatest happiness?"

"People say so."

"People say so? Do you not love the man who is to be your husband?"

"Mother's heart is bent upon this connexion. She has been attracted by the virtuous mode of life of the pious man, and does not think she could do better for me than to persuade me to marry him. I had, indeed, met many in the neighbourhood, but none made any impression upon my heart. The wild and rude hunters the raftsmen, the otter-hunters, and even the uneducated farmers who have settled near us, were not likely to win my affections. Mr. Rowson was the first who, by his gentle bearing and kind behaviour, gained my esteem. He often visited this part of the country,

preached here frequently, and my mother learned to esteem him. Indeed, she persuaded him to settle amongst us, and to choose a wife. He demanded my hand, and mother accepted the offer. I had never before thought of a matrimonial connexion with him; I always regarded him more as the parental friend than the lover, and the proposal took me by surprise. Besides, I may perhaps confess to you there was that in his eye which produced a kind of dread in my mind, more especially when I looked at him suddenly and unexpectedly; but again, when regarding him more closely, I noticed something in his expression mild and soft, which allured me. Yielding to mother's repeated solicitations, I at last gave my consent, but father refused his; he did not like the quiet, taciturn man, and several very serious scenes occurred between him and mother with reference to this matter. Candidly speaking, it was of little consequence to me which of the two gained the day; for though I thought that I might be happy with Mr. Rowson, it did not strike me that I must necessarily be unhappy in losing him. When father, at last, agreed to give way, and only insisted that Mr. Rowson should have enough property to maintain a wife without preaching, I promised to accept Mr. Rowson, and he is, as he told us to-day, in hopes of receiving shortly a sufficient sum, not only to buy the land on which he dwells, but also to stock it, and to procure the necessary agricultural implements. There will then be nothing to prevent the fulfilment of his wish, and I shall become his wife."

Marion uttered the concluding words in such a low and trembling voice, that Brown involuntarily halted and looked at her. She had turned her head aside, and the large bonnet which she wore completely concealed her face.

"You will be happy," he whispered, with a deep sigh.

"We must return, Mr. Brown," said Marion, after a short pause. "Look, the tops of the trees are already gilded by the rays of the setting sun, and in these woods darkness follows at once. Mother would be anxious."

The young couple directed their steps towards the house. After walking a few minutes, Marion said, with a smile, "I have now told you my whole history, in a few sentences, and thus shown the confidence I place in you; but confidence, as Mr. Rowson says, demands confidence, and it would be only

just that I should ask the same of you, that is, if you have no secrets which you would not consider safe in the keeping of such a chatterbox as myself."

"My life has passed away quietly enough," answered Brown; "in fact, almost too much so. Born in Virginia, my father, while I was still a child, removed to Kentucky, and was one of those who, with Daniel Boon, made the first settlement. I was hardly big enough to carry a rifle when I was compelled to fight against the Indians, for they harassed us night and day. For a long time we defied their cunning and their force, yet once, in an unlucky night, they intercepted my father, surprised and killed him. At day-break their battle-cry aroused us, and we heard the crackling of the flames which were consuming our block-house. All my people fell under the tomahawks of those red savages, and only by the merest chance did I escape their attention, and thereby the scalping-knife. I fled, and reached the nearest settlement. From this time we succeeded in driving the savages from their retreats, and compelled them to leave us in peace. In those days much innocent blood was spilt, and I do not yet know whether the white men were justified in taking such harsh and cruel measures against the Indians. It is true that they revenged themselves in a most horrible manner. Afterwards I joined my uncle in Missouri, where we lived for several years. Hearing of the rich soil and healthy climate of Fourche-la-Fave, we resolved to come hither. Uncle was always urging me to marry, for the bachelor-life we led had become a burden to both of us, but I could not find a person corresponding to the idea I had formed of the one who was to be my future wife. I could not make up my mind to marry, excepting for love. I was riding home late one evening through a part of the country which I had not previously visited; clouds obscured the sky; I lost myself, and alighted at a cottage from which I did, indeed, again find my way, but in which I left my peace and quiet for ever. I saw in that cottage a girl;—I saw—but why describe an angel I could not possess? That lady, Miss Roberts, was engaged. I remained a few days longer in Missouri, and then went to Texas, and thence to Arkansas. Thus my somewhat troubled mode of life may be explained, and you must kindly excuse my numerous defects. It is hard

to think one should find happiness, and then see it vanish, while the dream was still so beautiful."

Marion's head was bent down, and hot tears escaped from under the long and silken eyelashes, but Brown did not see them, for close at their side, in the thick brushwood of sassafras, a rustling noise attracted his attention ; a stealthy step was heard upon the dry moss, and at the very moment that the young man, apprehensive of danger, stood still and laid his hand upon his weapon, the thick branches opened, and a large panther sprang into the path, and glared ferociously upon the young couple who had dared to disturb its repose.

With a stifled cry, Marion, frightened to death, threw herself into Brown's arms. He supported her with his left hand, and with his right drew the pistol that he had before aimed at the Kentuckian. The panther wagged his long tail, in a half-angry and half-playful manner, as if undecided whether to attack or flee from the place.

Brown aimed at the animal's head, bent down as if about to spring. Being an experienced hunter, the sudden appearance of the panther by no means frightened him ; he fired, but the trembling of the beautiful girl he held in his arms caused him to miss the panther's head, and the bullet passing through its right shoulder, entered its flanks. The panther sprang up in terrible agony, and afterwards, as if the unexpected blow had completely cowed it, gave a shrill yelling growl, which was answered at no great distance, and disappeared with a bound into the thicket. The track of blood which it left behind, showed that the shot had not been without effect.

"The danger is over, Miss Marion, the animal has fled," said Brown, in a low tone of voice, trying to raise the trembling maiden who reposed upon his breast. "My shot has driven it away. Marion ! what is the matter with you ? Marion, collect yourself for Heaven's sake—Marion !"

The long-repressed feelings of the warm-blooded daughter of Arkansas now found vent, and sobbing, she leaned upon the shoulder of the beloved, and whispered, as if in deep sorrow, "Oh, I am very, very unhappy !"

"Marion, you will kill yourself and me !" the young man exclaimed. "Oh, that the happiest hour of my life should

be one that shows me all my misery at a glance. Yes, Marion, I do love you—love you with all the ardour of a heart that knows no other happiness on earth than that of possessing you; which in you beholds the star that could have illumined my future, and who now, despairing, looks for the last clear ray, as it disappears from his horizon, never to rise on him again. It is time to separate," he continued, with emotion; "I must not remain here; my presence could only create embarrassment, and render both you and me miserable. Early to-morrow I shall quit Arkansas, and I will try, in the wild confusion of battle, to render the remembrance less painful; as for forgetting you, Marion, that I shall never be able to do."

The young girl rested on his bosom, sobbing, and for some time the lovers remained in a close embrace. Brown at last led her back to the stump upon which they had been before seated. Marion, in bitter agony, kept her face hidden in her hands.

"Do you love the man to whom you are engaged?" Brown inquired, gently, taking Marion's hand, and drawing her nearer to him. "Did you ever love him?"

"Never—never!" exclaimed Marion, passionately, putting her hand upon her heart. "I had no will in the matter, and knew no one whom I might have preferred to him; while my mother advocated his suit with real admiration, and everybody else spoke well of him. I imagined that it was love I felt. Then you arrived. I admired your frank and open conduct; I learned to know your honest and true heart, and became wretched. The future appeared gloomy, a life of endless misery with that man whom I could no longer love, had he even acted with less cowardice; dark mists shrouded my former happiness and contentment, and all pleasure in life departed; but so it must be," she continued, rising. "Even this meeting is improper. I am betrothed to another. Let this be our last interview; it is better that it should be so. Spare me, I am but a weak woman, and I shall die of grief.'

"You are right, Marion; we must separate. I owe it to your heart and your honour. only desire to see you safely home, and I shall not again cross your path. You must allow me to take one memorial of this hour with me into

my dim and joyless future. Spare me a lock of your hair, that my eye may have something to dwell upon, when the heart prays for you and your welfare."

Marion bent her dear head towards him, and he easily cut off with his sharp hunting-knife a small lock. "I thank you," he then whispered, "and may the Lord bless you on your long and thorny path. May Rowson make you as happy as you deserve; and may you in your prayers sometimes think of the poor young man who will perhaps, ere long, have spilt his blood in the sacred cause of liberty. Farewell; may God bless you!"

In violent grief he embraced the beloved one, and their lips met, for the first time, in a long parting kiss. Marion withdrew from his arm, and hastened towards the dwelling, near which they had already arrived. Harper and Roberts met them immediately after. They had heard the shot, and being afraid that some accident had happened, went out in search of the young couple. Roberts took his daughter's arm, while Harper and Brown followed at a little distance.

"Uncle," said Brown, after they had walked on in silence for some time; "uncle, I shall set off to-morrow morning."

"Nonsense," exclaimed Harper, stopping, looking at his nephew with alarm. "Nonsense," he repeated, but in a doubtful tone of voice. "Where do you wish to go to?"

"To Texas," answered Brown.

"Will you leave your old uncle alone here? Is that right?"

"I must go," Brown replied.

"You must? Wherefore?"

Brown was silent, and turned away his head, grasping the old man's hand.

"So I am indeed to remain behind alone, sad and solitary in my hut. That is hard, Bill; it is not proper treatment. I shall disinherit you, Bill," continued Harper, after a short pause, making a painful effort to smile. "I shall really disinherit you."

Brown grasped his uncle's hand, and looked up into his face, his own eyes being dimmed with tears. The old man was poor; everything they possessed in common, in land, stock, and money, being in reality the nephew's property.

"Do not be afraid, uncle; your old age will be protected. You know that a week ago I had a letter from my lawyer

in Cincinnati. I have won my lawsuit, and payment cannot be much longer deferred. This very evening I shall write to Wolsey, and tell him to send everything to you. You can look after it till I come back, and if I do not return—— Well, we will speak of that presently. To-morrow morning I shall go to the Petite-Jeanne, and thence to Morrison's Bluff, on the Arkansas, where I have business to transact. In a week, I shall be back at your house on my way to Texas; in the meantime, you can settle with Roberts about that chestnut horse."

"Hallo, there," cried Roberts, who had reached the house with his daughter. "Hallo, there; you walk as if you had a weight at your heels. Come, Brown, supper is ready."

"Do you really mean to go?" asked Harper.

"I shall start directly. I have a letter to write, and some bullets to cast, as well as some bread to bake, that I may take provisions with me."

"Are you certain of returning here in a week?"

"You may take my word for it. Must I not fetch the horse? Until then, good-bye, uncle; in a week I am sure to return. Do not tell Roberts that you expect me back; I may not have time to call upon him, and he might take it amiss if I did not."

"Ah! what is Brown doing in the stable, Harper?" asked Roberts, when the latter entered without his friend; "supper is getting cold. My wife has already complained."

"He is off," said Harper, gloomily. "Heaven knows what has come into his head."

"Off! and this evening?" exclaimed Mr. and Mrs. Roberts in a breath; "and why?"

"He has business to-morrow at the Petite-Jeanne, and he is afraid of being late if he remained here to-night."

"It is strange that all this should have come into his head so suddenly," said Mrs. Roberts; "this afternoon he was quite agreeable to spend the day with us."

"He told me of his determination in our walk," Marion remarked, taking off her bonnet, "and said that he was sorry he could not remain with us. He must have very pressing business."

"On second thoughts, I fancy I had better accompany him. I am cook at home, and I must get some provisions. He may be away some days."

"But, Mr. Harper," said Mrs. Roberts, somewhat annoyed, "I cannot make you out, either of you. At any rate, take some refreshment."

"I had rather not, Mrs. Roberts; to-morrow morning, if you have no objection, I invite myself to breakfast. I will make one of your hunting-party, Roberts. Tim, bring my horse, and quickly," he continued, addressing a little negro boy. "I shall be here to-morrow morning at six. Am I to bring the Indian with me?"

"He may be of great use in looking for the pigs," Roberts observed.

"Only a cup of coffee before you go, Mr. Harper," said Mrs. Roberts. "You will not get anything warm at home."

"There can be no doubt on that point, Mrs. Roberts," answered the old man, advancing towards the table, and emptying the cup of coffee which had been offered to him. "It is, unfortunately, true. A bachelor's is a miserable kind of life. I think I shall get married."

"Ah, ah! that's a good idea," said Roberts. "Ride about the neighbourhood, and pick out a lady. I am sure, if you go in your new coat, which the tailor at Little-rock made you (by-the-bye, you never told me what it cost—the Little-rock tailors know how to charge) a short time ago, when I was there——"

"Good night, Mr. Roberts—good night, Mrs. Roberts—good night, Miss Roberts," were heard in the tones of Brown's voice outside the house, where he stood with his horse.

"Do come in a minute, and take a cup of coffee. Your uncle——"

"I had rather be excused, madam. Good night to all, once more."

"Stop; I am going with you," said Harper.

"You, uncle!"

"Yes; and the horse is ready. Until to-morrow morning. Hark ye, Roberts; do not take that small-bored rifle

with you; you had better cast bullets to-night for the other. It is miserable sport with such small shot. Good night to all," he continued, mounting, and settling himself in the saddle. "Good night."

Mr. and Mrs. Roberts stood at the door; and Brown again bade them good night, waving his hat as he caught a glimpse of the figure of his beloved. He knew that her was resting upon him. He struck his spurs smartly into the flanks of his faithful animal, which, with a sudden spring, jumped up, and in a few bounds disappeared from the light that streamed from the open door of the cottage.

"Stop!" cried Harper. "Are you mad? Do you mean to break your neck and legs? You must go steadily, if I am to keep up with you. What a hare-brained fellow he is!"

For some time after the horsemen had disappeared, the group could hear the old man talking and grumbling, urging his horse onward, in order to overtake his nephew.

"Wonderful!" cried Mrs. Roberts, sitting down with her husband and daughter to supper. "Why, the behaviour of those two is very strange. They might have spent the Sabbath in a better way than riding home, and——"

"Nonsense, old woman; that young fellow Brown is annoyed about Heathcott, and I think it natural enough, since the fellow boldly threatened to shoot him whenever he could, and he is bad enough to keep his word."

"Do you really think so, father?" Marion inquired, turning pale.

"The lad is a match for him," said the old man, without noticing the change in his daughter's countenance. "He is a good brave fellow, and has his heart in the right place. Since he first came with his uncle, about six weeks ago,—I remember I had just finished fencing-in the new piece of ground—capital ground it is, and will yield a splendid crop, especially if the weather continues favourable—well, the sun set beautifully to-day, and perhaps——"

"Will you take another cup of coffee, Roberts?" asked his wife.

"No, I thank you."

"Well, then we will have evening prayers," answered

the matron, taking down from the shelf a carefully-preserved testament and prayer-book.

Oh! with what fervour the poor unfortunate girl prayed on this occasion! How earnestly she implored happiness and peace on the head of the beloved! When at last she sought her couch, she bedewed her pillow with tears, and, like a child, fell asleep, tired with weeping, with folded hands, and the name of the dear one upon her lips.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BEAR HUNT—A STRANGE DISCOVERY—THE INDIAN'S ACUTENESS.

THE next morning dawned bright and clear. The first rays of the sun stole over the tops of the mountains. The whip-poor-will uttered its usual sad and discordant cries, the owls screamed from the thick wood in the low grounds, and at intervals the angry cries of the wild turkeys were heard from the bushes. At length the smaller singing birds awoke, and deep in the forest, in a solitary farm-yard, a cock crowed its shrill morning notes in the fresh air. The dew had fallen heavily; every blade had a row of clear crystals, and large drops fell from the higher branches, making a dull, heavy sound on the leaves scattered below. Flowers and buds exhaled the most fragrant odours.

Two horsemen rode slowly along the county road. These were Harper and Brown. Both were dressed like western hunters, in leathern hunting-shirts, gaiters, and mocassins, with rifles on their shoulders, and their broad knives open at their sides. Brown had told his uncle everything. He could not be reserved on such a matter with his kind friend. Without exchanging a word, each being occupied with his own serious thoughts, they had arrived near the salt-pool, where Harper, the day before, met with the adventure with the stag. From this spot a narrow path led across the ridge towards the Cypress river, and thence to the Petite-Jeanne. Brown halted here to take leave of his uncle.

"Good-bye, boy," the latter at last exclaimed, after they had taken hands cordially. "Do your business, and return

with a mind at ease. You will learn to forget the girl. I believe it will be difficult; but, dear me, one forgets so many things. I could tell you a very sad story on that point, but we are both of us in low spirits enough without another sorrowful tale. While you are absent I will get everything you can want. I will buy the chestnut horse. I will myself fetch the blankets from Little-rock, or send a trustworthy person for them. You shall have the pouch; and, by your return, Alapaha will have tanned the hide for your new hunting-shirt. She only wanted some stag's brains to finish it, and I hope that we shall get at least four stags to-day. Well, God bless you, my boy! Come back quickly, and take care of yourself. If you fall in the way of the Regulators (the fellows went that road), do not commence a fresh quarrel. It will lead to nothing, and can bring you no honour."

"Be not afraid, uncle; the fellow will keep out of my way. Should he run against me, I shall know how to act. Good-bye! If the money arrives from Cincinnati during my absence, you will know what to do with it. I shall be back in a week. Remember me to Marion, for the last time; then I shall try to forget her. Good-bye, uncle; when we meet again, I hope that we shall both have regained our former spirits."

The men separated, and Harper remained in the road until his nephew's tall figure, seated on the little shaggy pony, had disappeared behind the sharp ridge; then he went on his way, shaking his head, and whistling in a shrill manner an old air, without paying much heed either to tune or time. The muscles of his face alone moved, and it was evident that the poor old man was trying to master the grief which he felt at the prospect of losing his nephew. He soon reached Roberts's house, which he found in a great bustle. Two neighbours had arrived for the hunt, and Harper was received with a loud shout. The men shouted, the dogs howled, the ducks and geese gabbled, and the old cock flew frightened on the roof, and looking about, stared in amazement at the noisy set below. Breakfast was ready, consisting of hot coffee with fresh cream and brown sugar, fried bacon, and bear steaks; some venison, pickles, honey, and butter. The guests needed no second invitation, and the empty dishes soon showed how excellent their appetites were.

Every one then put on his shot-belt, took his rifle, and mounted his horse. The animals were found at the door, in charge of a negro. Harper alone, before following the others, stepped up to Marion, who was sitting at the fire, and pressed her hand in silence. The young girl looked at him timidly, but his glance reassured her; she saw in him an image of the beloved, and with a sigh hid her face in her hands. The next minute the hunters were ready, and with a small horn, Roberts called the dogs together. They jumped upon the horses, howling and moaning, and away the party went with a merry shout into the deep, green, boundless forest.

Harper's sadness disappeared as soon as his horse trotted under the dark shadow of the trees. He was now only a hunter—and in Arkansas a hunter has no time for care and sorrow. They went right across the mountain-ridge which divides the waters of the Fourche-la-Fave from those of the Cypress river, rode up the latter stream to its source, and then followed the mountain-ridge along the Petite-Jeanne, until they descended, and reached the low-land, in the broad and fertile valley of this river.

"I wonder where the Indian can be, Harper," said Roberts, at last. "Did you not say that he was to meet us at the Petite-Jeanne? Heaven knows where the fellow has got to! I should think our trail is broad enough; he can easily follow it. What is the matter with Etty, eh, Curtis? Look how she wags her tail. If Poppy were only here—those wretches are on some wrong scent."

Saying these words, Roberts jumped from his horse, and went to the spot where Etty, a young bitch, was engaged inspecting a fresh trail. A bear had passed that way in the morning towards the river, about two miles distant, and might have rested on this spot for a short time, as the dog was not to be coaxed away.

"Hang it!" exclaimed Curtis, who had also dismounted, "that must be a powerful animal, and does not appear so very light either. Only look how he has pressed his paws into the ground. Oh! our poor pigs; they will have paid dearly for this. And yet—no, this one is not a bear track after all. A man has been here—perhaps an Indian; and another here. It could not be Assowaum; but where the deuce

are the dogs? The bear can hardly have got across the river. Sound your horn, Roberts."

Roberts sounded a few notes upon the instrument, and in a moment the panting of the dogs was heard, and immediately Poppy sprang into the clearing in which the men were collected. The others soon followed, for Poppy was the leader of the pack, and they yelped about the place where they had caught scent of their prey. A young beagle, getting a better scent than the rest, began to howl, and, with the swiftness of an arrow, ran upon the wrong trail into the forest, towards the hills. Poppy, for the first time for many long years, was deceived, and pursued the younger dog in great haste, as if unwilling to be second. The others could be no longer restrained, and giving tongue, they quickly disappeared in the broad thicket which skirted the hills.

Roberts in vain called after them, and sounded his horn till his veins almost burst and his face grew purple; his associates seconded his efforts, but the pack were beyond control.

"Curse the dogs!" exclaimed old Roberts in a rage, throwing his cap upon the ground. "They are running away on the wrong scent. Such a thing never happened before, and we shall be the laughing-stock of the neighbourhood."

"What can have possessed the animals?" said Curtis.

"It was that liver-coloured dog led them astray," said another hunter, a storekeeper from the Eastern States, who had recently arrived on a visit to Curtis, and wished for once to join a regular Arkansas hunt. "The liver-coloured animal first set off towards the hills."

"Curse the liver-coloured animal!" cried Roberts, angrily. "That is Curtis's dog; the cur has no more idea of a bear track than a sheep has of the Cherokee language. If that dog was mine, Curtis, I would be hanged if I did not shoot it."

"Well, I only wish Mrs. Roberts and Mr. Rowson could hear you at prayers," said Harper, laughing.

"Let Mr. Rowson mind his own business," returned Roberts. "I should not pick my words even if he were present."

"What would you say if Mrs. Roberts were here?"

"She does not visit the swamps of the Petite-Jeanne," answered Roberts. "But we are standing here like a bear in an orchard, not knowing which way to go. It is not likely that the hounds will return for three or four hours. Then they will be as tired as—— well, as dogs."

"Poppy, at any rate, was stupid enough to follow my dog," said Curtis, somewhat sharply.

"Yes, when an animal like that takes the lead, and makes a noise as if it had found heaven knows what. Let Poppy look to that—she will catch it."

"Whist, whist!" cried Harper, stretching out his left arm, and laying down his rifle. He put his hand to his ear—"Whist! I hear something that does not sound like the barking of dogs. I hear it again. It is Assowaum; and now I would bet anything he has called the dogs off. Sound your horn, Roberts. He does not know exactly where we are."

Roberts again blew his horn, and was answered by a shout which seemed to proceed from the neighbouring hills.

"Hurrah! That was Assowaum's voice; and if he has fallen in with the dogs, he is sure to bring them back with him. Poppy knows him well enough."

Harper's conjecture proved to be correct. In less than a quarter of an hour the Indian made his appearance, bringing the pack with him. The dogs seemed to leave the trail unwillingly, and Assowaum was leading Poppy.

"Where did you find the dogs, Red-skin?" asked Roberts, with great glee.

"A large bear crossed the hills," answered the Indian. "Deep tracks, and not hungry. He has turned over no stones looking for worms. His track leads directly to the river. The thicket affords a quiet retreat in that direction, and there are not many mosquitoes. Assowaum knows the spot."

"How did you fall in with the dogs?"

"When Assowaum finds the trail of a bear, he knows which way the animal has passed. I met Poppy, and as he jumped upon me, I laid hold of him. When the bees swarm, they always follow their queen. So it is with dogs, and when their leader quits the track, the others abandon it

also. Assowaum has had many a piece of venison in his hut. They know him; waugh!"

With these words he stretched out his hand and pointed at the pack around him, all of which, with the exception of a few young animals, had returned.

"That Assowaum is a capital fellow!" said Harper, rubbing his hands gleefully—"a capital fellow!"

"Let us set the animals on the right trail, and like lightning——"

"They will return to the hills," said Assowaum. "I shall lead Poppy. The others will follow, and if we once put them upon the right scent they will not lose it again."

The Indian's advice was adopted, and Poppy seemed to understand that he had made a very stupid mistake. He let his tail hang down, and looked mournfully at his guide. Assowaum would not trust him alone until he had followed him for about two hundred paces, and he perceived that the dog was not to be much longer kept back. He then let him loose, and animated by his wild hunting shout, which re-echoed through the forest, the large and beautiful animal, whining and yelping, followed the trail, and, pursued by the whole pack, soon disappeared in the thicket.

"Now to your horses," cried old Roberts, who seemed twenty years younger than before. "Huzza, Poppy—Auhupeeh!" He threw out the last syllable with such force, that even the horses, as if delighting in the pleasures of the chase, bounded off. Through thicket and swamp, over fallen trees and pools, in places where the forest was matted by prickly creepers, as far as the reed thicket, which, three hundred paces wide, bordered the river, went the chase. All, with the exception of the storekeeper, sat firmly in their saddles. Immediately after entering the thicket of briers he lost his balance, and his piercing cries for help caused the hunters to return to render aid. Harper reined in his horse for a moment—only for a moment; in the next the faithful animal again felt his spur. No Arkansas hunter on a hot bear scent would return to a fallen comrade.

When they reached the reed thicket, they all had to dismount; and leaving their horses to shift for themselves, the men forced their way through the labyrinth—in some places so thick as to require the aid of a knife. The hunters had

indeed reason to advance as quickly as possible, for from the middle of the thicket a great clamour resounded.

The dogs whined and barked—the dry reeds crackled—the leaves rustled—and the men shouted, in order to animate the dogs. One might have fancied that a hurricane was passing over the wood, or that the wild huntsman with his ghostly company had made his first appearance in the primitive forests of America.

The bear was at bay. The hounds had surprised him in his lair, into which he had just before retreated; and he must have been taken completely by surprise, for the first two dogs, Poppy and Etty, were almost upon him before he could prepare himself for the encounter. Etty was only good for speed and on a trail, but worth little in a real fight. Poppy, though a heavier dog, had no greater pleasure than that of seizing a bear by the haunches, for he very prudently kept out of the reach of his fore-paws. As Bruin was about to retreat, with his nose close to the ground, in order to force his way under the creepers, Poppy took such hold of his haunches, and held so fast, that the animal turned round with a snarl to strike the hound with his paws. Poppy, not inclined to wait, as soon as he saw that the bear was at bay, had attained his aim, and with the swiftness of lightning darted aside, thereby escaping the dangerous blow, but repeated the attack as soon as the bear again sought to make its escape. Of course the two dogs could not have detained the bear any time in this manner; but the rest of the pack came up, and Bruin had to think seriously of making his escape, if he wished to get off with a whole skin.

The bear dashed towards the river, now close at hand, through the densest part of the thicket. The hounds again and again pressed forward to the attack, though only a few of them dared to approach the enemy. He was at last obliged to turn into an open space, and to dash into a shallow slough, the steep banks of which had the effect of retarding the dogs, as in case of an attack they could not escape his blows. For a time he distanced his pursuers; but the hunters got the opportunity of cutting off his retreat, as the noise of the pack showed in what direction the bear had started. As the bear made another attempt to turn to the left and approach the river, Roberts rushed out of the

thicket, close upon its heels, aimed and fired. At this moment the report of another gun was heard, and Curtis's bullet whistled towards the beast. Though both shots took effect, yet they did not inflict a serious wound, for Bruin jumped up with a faint growl, that almost sounded like a sigh, and at one bound gained the crest of the slough, struck down the dog next him with a blow of his paw, and fled towards the river,

Roberts lost no time. With a spring that would have done credit to a panther, he cleared the slough, and got near the animal with open knife, just as it reached the bank of the river. A third rifle cracked, and Roberts just then came up with the exhausted animal, plunging his steel into its flanks. In the heat of pursuit he had not observed the locality, and the bear with a last effort, and in agony, not even opposing the two dogs, Poppy and Watch (the latter was Harper's animal), who rushed upon him, ran down the steep bank into the river, and bear, Roberts, Poppy, and Watch disappeared together into the muddy stream of the Petite-Jeanne.

"Waugh!" cried Assowaum, as, holding on to a small branch by his left hand, he looked over the bank. "Good luck; the white man holds tight."

Before any of the hunters could reach the place of action they returned to the surface; and Roberts, not in the least degree disconcerted by his sudden immersion, dragged the dead bear towards the land, with the two dogs, which had not relinquished their hold even under the water. Then he looked at the steep down which he had been so suddenly precipitated. He met Harper's eye, who was looking on with astonishment, and exclaimed—

"Hallo, Roberts! What the deuce are you doing there? How are we to get the animal up?"

"If I could only get up again myself, I should not much care," answered Roberts. "We went down easily enough; but there may be some difficulty in returning."

"Wait a bit," said Assowaum. "I will aid you."

"Wait!" cried Roberts, with a comical expression. "I should like to know what else I can do. When one gets into such a scrape as this, nothing but patience will do."

"Is the bear fat?" Harper inquired.

"Pretty much so," said Roberts, feeling the animal's flanks, as it lay near him in the stream. "Will you not come, and convince yourself?"

"Thank you, I will take your word for it," said Harper, laughing. "I am in no particular hurry."

Assowaum constructed a kind of ladder from the branches of hickory he cut down at his side, and then climbed up a small oak-tree, and cut off a thin branch of the wild vine. Having let these down to Roberts, he told him to tie the dogs to the vine-slip. By the aid of a belt and a pocket-handkerchief this was easily done, and the animals were drawn up to the top of the bank.

"Now for the bear," said Harper. "How shall we manage with it? The animal weighs three hundred pounds at the very least; and I do not see how it can be got up without ropes."

"Well," answered Assowaum, "we can leave it there. Do you see those two large pieces of dry wood, on the brink of the river? We can roll them into the stream, make the bear fast to them, and Assowaum will go with them down the river. Bahrens lives a mile and a half lower down. You can follow on horseback, and by sunset we shall all meet at Bahrens's house."

"An excellent idea, Assowaum," ejaculated Roberts, nimbly climbing up by aid of the branches, and joining his comrades. "An excellent idea. Bahrens has just finished making a road down to the river, by means of which we shall be able to get our game on shore comfortably."

"A moment, Assowaum," cried Curtis, as the Indian began to put his project into execution. "Just as you get near Bahrens's house, at the spot at which we cut down the cypress-tree last summer, make the spoil fast, and come to the house. Bahrens is so fond of boasting about the game he kills, that we should like to see what he has in the larder. Take care he does not perceive your prize."

The Indian gave a knowing nod, said nothing more, but set to work to carry out his plan. The logs were rolled into the river, the bear was made fast, and in less than a quarter of an hour he set off down the stream. The wood kept the bear afloat, and partly swimming and partly wading, Assowaum steered the raft on its course.

"An Indian is of use in the forest," Harper observed, as Assowaum disappeared behind a bend in the river. "How practical these fellows are; and, if they once hit upon a plan, they are certain to carry it out. Hallo, here comes Hartfort, the storekeeper. The deuce take me, if I had not altogether forgotten him."

"Tell me what you are doing here," the storekeeper said, making his way through the brushwood. "Where is the bear?"

"Assowaum is steering him down the stream to Bahrens's house," said Roberts in reply, "and we will return to our horses, and ride along the bank till we reach the old hunter's dwelling. This is the easiest way of getting there. The place is so concealed by the wood, that one can only hit upon it by chance, or in the morning, when the cocks are crowing."

"What is the use of my coming to a bear hunt," said Hartfort, "if I do not get a glimpse of the animal?"

"You shall see the bear, man," answered Harper, "and taste it too. Let us be off; the sun will set in less than an hour, and I should like to get out of this thicket before it is dark. Hallo, dogs; get up, and you shall have a good supper to-night. Good dog, Watch; good dog, Poppy; set the others a good example."

The dogs, which had all lain down exhausted, jumped up at these words, and followed the hunters, who availed themselves of a clearing to skirt the river some hundred paces, and were about to turn towards the hills, when the storekeeper suddenly stopped, and taking hold of Roberts by the arm, said—

"Whist! don't you see there?"

"What?" asked Roberts.

"That red thing in the thicket."

"Ay, a stag; it has just started. Fire before the dogs get scent, or it will be too late."

The storekeeper quickly raised his rifle, stood a moment taking aim, and as the gun went off, the stag gave a bound, and disappeared in the thicket.

"He is hit! he is hit!" the storekeeper shouted, running to the spot at which he had first seen the stag. "Do you see the blood, and Poppy, good animal, has caught scent."

The dogs, however, seemed to behave very strangely, for while Etty and a few others followed the fleet stag, Watch stood sniffing the ground, without paying heed to the cries of the others, and Poppy even sat down, raising his nose and howling most piteously.

"What the deuce is the matter with the dogs?" said Roberts, going towards them with astonishment. "I suppose he is howling because you have missed the stag."

"Missed!" cried the storekeeper, in a rage, "does that look as if I had missed? And here—and here," he continued, pointing to spots of blood—"do you call that missed?"

"There is blood enough," said Curtis, surprised; "but did not the stag go the other way, in the direction taken by the dogs? It struck me that I saw his light form glancing between the brambles."

"You are right," said Harper; "he went between those cypress trees."

"Then this must be some other blood," said Curtis; "and it goes towards the river."

"Impossible! the bear did not pass that way."

"Certainly not, but a good bit higher up."

"Is there no track?"

"None. But soft, the sportsman must have passed this way; here is the print of a man's foot," said Curtis, stooping down, "and here is another. There must have been two people; and they seem to have kept on both sides of the blood-marks."

"What does this mean?" said Roberts; "the ground is perfectly even, and yet there are no tracks in the blood."

"You are right," said Harper. "It is not game they were pursuing, but an animal which they killed and carried away. See how deep the tracks go into the ground. They bore towards the river, and I should not at all wonder if it turned out to be Bahrens, and we may to-night find a good piece of venison at his place."

"Bahrens never wears anything but mocassins," Curtis remarked, "and these are the marks of thick shoes on one side, and on the other the new kind of boots like those which Brown bought a short time since at Little-rock. For all that, they may have taken their game to Bahrens's house."

"Come along now, and leave the tracks," exclaimed Roberts; "the sun will soon have set, and we must try to get out of these cursed reeds. If they have carried the game to Bahrens's house, and if the old man was indeed one of the party, we shall find them to-night, and hear a long story, that is certain. Let us away."

"Just look at that dog, how strangely it behaves," said Harper. "Are you not ashamed of yourself, Poppy? The animal howls enough to make one mad."

Poppy did not seem to pay any attention to the remark, but kept sniffing at the drops of blood, and began again to whine so piteously, that the hounds returning from the false scent collected around, and joining in the cry made a great noise.

"Gentlemen," said Roberts, suddenly, looking narrowly at his dog, "there is something wrong here. Poppy is much too sagacious to make this outcry for nothing. This is not brute blood—it is that of a man."

"The devil it is!" said Curtis.

"Let us follow the traces down to the river," continued Roberts; "we may thus unravel the mystery, or at least be able to mark the spot, that we may renew our researches to-morrow."

They followed the traces easily enough. At certain intervals small bushes had been trodden down, showing that the burthen was a weighty one. The marks were on both sides, as if the load, whatever it was, had been supported between the two men, not one going before and the other behind, as game is generally carried.

"The sight of the blood sends a chill through my veins," said the storekeeper.

"That arises from your not having been long enough in Arkansas," said Curtis. "If, like me, you had lived ten years in the State, you would think differently on the matter. I have seen many a corpse in my time, and have helped to bury many a murdered man. One really gets accustomed to the thing. Only upon one occasion was the sight too much for me."

"Now keep the story to yourself," cried Roberts, a little ruffled; "we have something horrible enough beneath our gaze, and don't want your grand inquest story. Leave the dead in peace."

"You must tell me the tale," said the storekeeper; "I like such stories."

"Another time," answered Curtis. "There is the river; we shall soon find what we are searching for."

"Here they put the burthen down," said Roberts, pointing to a spot in which the brushwood and the grass had been crushed to the ground. "Deer or man, from this place he was thrown into the stream."

Curtis knelt down upon the ground and examined it closely. He suddenly started to his feet, exclaiming—"It was a man!—don't you see the impression of a button? I can trace it distinctly in the smooth surface of the bank. There it is, close to yonder dark spot of blood, near that yellow leaf."

"I see it," cried Roberts, having directed his attention to the place indicated by his comrade. "It was indeed a man. Here is the spot where his hand rested—I can see the mark of the nail quite plain. Gentlemen, a murder has been committed here, of that there cannot now be any doubt, and we must return to-morrow to investigate the matter more thoroughly. It is too late now; if we remain here ten minutes longer we shall be compelled to encamp for the night, as it will be impossible for us to make our way through the thicket in the dark. To-morrow, at daybreak, we will endeavour to ascertain who the victim is, and who are the murderers. Let us be off at once, as this is not a good place in a dark night."

The hunters required no further invitation. They cut their way silently through the reeds, and came up with their horses, before the twilight faded from the sky. They mounted, and at a sharp trot passed along the open part of the forest, between the reeds and the thick brushwood at the base of the hills, arriving before dark at the ford of the Petite-Jeanne, on the opposite side of which old Bahrens's cottage stood. Its owner was known in the neighbourhood by the nick-name of Story-telling Bahrens.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO GENUINE BACKWOODSMEN—BAHRENS AND HARPER—TALE-TELLING MATCH.

THE old man stood at the door of his cottage, evidently expecting the hunting party, and kept looking in the direction in which they would first appear. Assowaum sat at his feet, busily engaged putting on the mocassins, which he had taken off on his excursion down the stream.

Bahrens was one of the real pioneers or squatters of the Far West. About five years before, he had settled in Poinsett county, in the most wretched swamps, where no human habitation was to be met with in a circuit of twenty miles. He had lived there by the chase very contentedly for some time. Something of which he did not like to speak then occurred; he called it family affairs, and he was compelled to quit that part of the country. The dwellers on the Fourche-la-Fave said something about his love for horse-flesh, but there could be no ground for the suspicion; for, in the first place, they spoke in utter ignorance of the country in which he had lived, and in which there was no opportunity for such occupation; and, in the second place, Bahrens had always borne the reputation of an honest man, and none of his neighbours could prove anything against him. Most of his acquaintances were, indeed, of opinion that he sometimes trenched a little upon the truth, as Roberts expressed it; but he himself obstinately denied the charge, and was always ready to swear to any of his stories. It was remarked that he would never make any bets about them, although given to betting on other matters. He attended chiefly to the breeding of stock, only cultivating a very small piece of ground, about five acres in extent, on which he grew maize for himself and his family. He also kept horses, but only a few, because he thought that the air of Arkansas did not suit them. His family consisted of his wife, two daughters, and a son; the latter had quitted the family roof two years before, and as he could neither read nor write, no news had been received of his wanderings.

The dwelling was one of those log-huts so common in the Far West of America, constructed from rough and

unhewn trunks, its roof being made of rudely-shaped planks, kept in their places by a heavy weight. A thin bluish smoke arose from the chimney, and a man was busily engaged cutting fire-wood, in order to keep up a cheerful flame on the hearth during the evening. Scores of young pigs, kept from the house by a low fence, stood near this barrier, grunting in expectation of their usual supper, a few stalks of Indian corn. In a separate enclosure the eldest daughter, a pretty black-eyed girl, was milking a large white cow, while her younger sister held a little calf by a short piece of rope, and prevented it from interfering with the milking operations, to which it seemed to entertain a particular objection. At the side of the house, perched on the large trunks that lay in the half-cultivated field, might be seen a number of buzzards, having apparently either been disturbed from their evening repast, or induced to leave it only to return on the morrow to their loathsome meal.

The hunters appeared advancing towards the house, and Roberts shouted to its owner—"I wronged you, after all, I fear. I thought that we should find you without any provisions; but the buzzards there show that you have something in store, unless one of your cows has sickened and died."

"Well met, boys; welcome. I am glad you have for once looked in upon old Bahrens—a cow dead, Roberts! no meat in my place! You don't know old Bahrens. When I lived on the Cash river, I could on the average get from eight to nine hundred pounds of flesh a day with my rifle. Curtis knows that to be correct; don't you, Curtis?"

"Certainly I do; tame animals into the bargain."

"Tame ones of course, including game—such as buffaloes, and cattle run wild. But dismount, dismount; make yourselves at home. Give the horses a feed, Betsy; do you hear? Stay with them until they have done their meal, and keep back the pigs, or they will turn the trough over again as they did yesterday."

"There must be some carrion about here, Bahrens," cried Roberts, when the first salutations had been exchanged; "I can smell it."

"Carrion! God bless you," answered Bahrens, laughing, "you have a good nose; there is nothing of the kind here; the buzzards always come when anything is killed."

"Killed!" exclaimed Curtis, horrified; "does that which you have killed smell in this manner? What are you about, Assowaum?" he continued, as the Indian smothered a laugh.

"Mr. Bahrens has killed a little pig," returned the Indian, evidently enjoying the joke; "but buzzards are stupid animals; the pig was only killed the day before yesterday, and they are here already."

"Is that to be our food?" Roberts inquired, laughing. "Where are the stags?"

"Which stags?"

"Those you shoot every day, as you said a short time since."

"Oh, I have sprained my foot, and this has kept me at home the last three days," answered Bahrens.

"This is a friend of mine, Bahrens; Mr. Harper, one of my neighbours, who wishes to make your acquaintance. Harper—Mr. Bahrens, the man of whom I have told you so much. I believe you will be great friends."

The newly introduced pair shook hands, Bahrens saying, "I will be shot if you have not an uncommonly good-looking face, Mr. Harper."

"But, Bahrens," said Curtis, interrupting him, "to-morrow at break of day we must be at the slough, near the three cypress-trees. A murder has been committed there; at least appearances justify the suspicion."

"A murder! that would be dreadful."

"It can hardly be otherwise; we found the traces too clearly, but had not time to investigate the matter thoroughly. The place is not far off, and in the morning we can easily ascertain whether we are right or not. At any rate, it would be impossible to do more to-day."

"Dear me, that is strange," said Bahrens. "I passed that way this morning, and did not observe anything."

"I thought that you had sprained your ankle," said Curtis, smiling.

"I did, three days ago; do you think, blockhead, that I am to hop on one foot all the rest of my life? the idea is too ridiculous! but come in, boys. The mist is rising very thick this evening, and we shall be comfortable at the fireside."

"No, old fellow," said Roberts, tapping him on the shoulder; "if you are so badly off for provisions, we will first make our own contribution. Assowaum, let us have the bear; we cannot hide it any longer, or we shall starve, for it is getting dark."

To the joyful astonishment of Bahrens, the Indian brought the fat animal to the river's bank, and by their united efforts it was dragged up to the house, and in a short time some of the choicest joints were handed over to the females for culinary purposes.

"Good evening, Mrs. Bahrens," said Roberts, stepping into the house, and greeting her. "How are you? I have not seen you for some time. Are you still in health?"

"I do not know how I should manage otherwise," she replied, taking off the large bonnet which she wore while cooking, and wiping with her apron the perspiration from her brow. "I am glad you have given us a call. I hope soon to pay you a visit; but my old man does not like leaving home."

"My wife has been expecting you and the girls this long time, Mrs. Bahrens," answered Roberts, shaking hands. "How are your daughters, eh? They have, I suppose, got accustomed to this solitary mode of life, for in the Cash swamps it could not have been more cheerful. That is a horrible part of the country when I was there last, and went by Strong's—the man who owns the large farm. How many negroes did he buy last summer?"

"Stop him, for Heaven's sake, stop him!" cried Bahrens. "He is running away again with the reins loose. If you do not stop him, in five minutes he will be at the war of independence."

"Bless me, Bahrens, one cannot speak a reasonable word for you."

"You deserve something, lads," said Bahrens, "for having made such provision. Lucy, bring out the jar from under the bed. Take care, girl, and don't break it. Now we shall have a merry evening. Bear's meat and whisky—auhupeeh!" cried the old man to the dogs, who were making a great noise outside.

"The dogs are tearing one another to pieces outside," said Curtis, at last. "They are all hungry; let us give them some food. Let them have the pork; it is not fit for men!"

"What! my good meat!"

"Oh! nonsense about your meat. I thought you killed so many stags?"

"Yes; but my sprained ankle."

"There he is again, with his sprained ankle. It is an excellent excuse; but, Harper, why do you sit so quiet; are you thinking of the murder?"

"Yes; seriously speaking, I cannot drive the blood spots out of my mind. They really looked horrible."

"Horrible, Mr. Harper; you should have been with me on the Cash river," said Bahrens. "Two or three bodies floated by every day: such horrible sights, some of them without a head."

"Where did they all come from? I thought it had been such a retired spot?"

"The bodies? Well, you don't suppose I inquired into the matter. It was no business of mine."

"Stop!" exclaimed Roberts, laughing, "keep your stories till after dinner. Let us first look to the horses; the supper will relish better if we do."

This piece of advice was immediately followed; and when the men returned, they were summoned by the good woman to supper. They soon sat round the small table on barrels, boxes, logs of wood, and roughly-constructed chairs. A large dish, containing roasted meat, cut into small pieces, formed the centre-piece; while maize bread, pumpkins, and some honey and milk made up the rest of the repast. The whisky bottle went round; and though nothing was said, the clatter of the knives and plates, and the well-picked bones, showed how well the guests had worked.

When they had finished, they got up, and the females, who had wisely reserved something for themselves, assembled at the vacant board, and without taking the trouble to get fresh plates, soon demolished the rest of the bear's flesh. Mrs. Bahrens, though about forty years of age, still showed traces of early beauty, and her slender figure was clad in a by no means clean cotton gown, that had once been white; her beautiful brown hair was negligently twisted round her head, and her large dark eyes lost much of their lustre from the general untidiness of her appearance. Her daughters were somewhat better dressed, and more tidy; but

even they would have been all the better for a little soap and warm water.

When the dinner, or rather the dishes, were taken away, for the former had entirely disappeared, Bahrens pushed the table back a little, so that the guests might form a half circle round the chimney, and exclaimed, "Well, gentlemen, the best is coming now—the stew."*

"You have no butter," said his wife.

"The devil! that is true; but, hallo! what do we want with butter—we have bear's fat! Whisky mixes better with bear's fat than butter. This is the country to live in, gentlemen. There is nothing like Arkansas."

"Why, Mr. Bahrens," Harper said, who, observing the preparations for his favourite beverage, began to grow warm, "I do not know. Missouri is not to be despised. I lived there a long while, and——"

"Missouri!" cried Bahrens, in amazement. "Missouri! Dear me, do you compare it with Arkansas?"

"It is close to it."

"Close to it! Yes, but it is just as if some one had drawn a line between the two States, making the one fertile, and the other barren. Missouri! Missouri! Why, what are you thinking of? How long have you been in Arkansas?"

"About six weeks."

"That makes a difference; you have not had time to look about you. The land here is so rich, that when we want candles we have only to stick a wick into any pool, and it will burn fast enough. If a man in Arkansas tills his ground with industry and attention, he may rely upon getting a hundred bushels per acre."

"That's a good crop."

"A good crop! it is nothing at all. If he does not take much care, and lets the maize grow as it likes, he will get seventy-five bushels; and should he not sow at all, he will get about fifty. The land can't be exhausted."

Harper fidgeted a little on his seat, while Roberts and Curtis glanced furtively at each other, at these remarks.

"There is another advantage," said Bahrens; "we only need sow in June, the maize grows so fast. Peas grow with

* In the Far West, by the expression "stew," is meant a beverage composed of whisky, hot water, spice, sugar, and butter.

railroad rapidity, and such pumpkins! Ten men can stand round one of them."

"An astonishing country," said Harper. "Everything is on a grand scale. Such mosquitoes, and such wood-lice, are not to be met with elsewhere."

"Everything on a grand scale!" Bahrens repeated, quite in his glory, boasting of the land in which he lived. "Everything on a grand scale! I should say so. On a hot summer's day, the mosquitoes fly so thick that they will often stick together, falling in lumps from the air; and the wood-lice I have seen with my own eyes standing up on their fore-legs, and listening to the cow-bells; and as to the fleas, why, they go to water in the evening like other animals. Bless me, what rivers we have! they roll the sea back with wonderful power when they join it."

"But they do not join it," said Harper.

"Do not join it! Where do they go, then?" asked Bahrens, with eagerness. "Do they lose themselves in the sand, eh? Where does the Petite-Jeanne run to?"

"Into the Arkansas," answered Harper.

"And the Arkansas?"

"Into the Mississippi."

"And the Mississippi?"

"Into the Gulf of Mexico."

"Well, is not that all the same? Take, for instance, the southern part of Missouri. Have any of you been in the southern part of that State?"

"Most likely all of us have," answered Roberts.

"At the Eleven Points river, too! I wont exaggerate; but the country about there is so rocky, that we had to lift the sheep up by their hind legs, one after the other, to assist them to get at the small pieces of grass between the stones. The wolves got so thin and weak, that they had to lean against a tree whenever they wanted to howl. Look at the difference between Missouri and Arkansas. How did we manage, for example, in the winter, when we had nothing to give the poor animals to eat? Now, just guess."

"You let them run about in the wood," said Curtis.

"Of what use would that have been, I should like to know? The ground was so hard that no bark grew upon the bushes and trees. No, I adopted quite a different ex-

pedient. You know Tom, the fellow who went in such haste on business into Texas; that tall Tom, don't you remember, Roberts? He was so tall that he was obliged to kneel down every time he wanted to scratch his head. That same fellow had been an optician in Philadelphia, I believe, and had brought a lot of instruments. I set him to make me a lot of large green spectacles, which I put on over the cows' eyes; I gave them shavings to eat, and I will be hanged if they did not take them for grass, and grew quite fat upon them."

"Dear me!" cried Harper.

"We are better off, here," continued Bahrens, with delight; "and as for the chase——"

"Hallo!" interrupted Harper; "nothing must be said against the chase in Missouri. It cannot be better anywhere else."

"Indeed!" said Bahrens, with a sneer. "If a bear hereabouts has not more than three inches of fat upon his back, he is called lean. As for the stags——"

"They are caught by the leg," Roberts remarked.

Bahrens looked at the speaker with astonishment, and Harper seemed greatly pleased.

"Well, Roberts, you must agree to this," continued Bahrens—"but the water boils, Betsy; brew the punch; you know how we like it—you must agree to this, Roberts, that none can beat me in hunting. I have quite given up shooting small game, having a particular plan for catching it."

"Like the boys with us," said Harper; "they catch rabbits in traps."

"Traps!" repeated Bahrens, with a sneer, "traps are not wanted; you must come to Arkansas if you wish to learn something. When there is a little snow upon the ground, I go into the wood, just out of sight of the house——"

"Which is not very far," Curtis remarked.

"There I place small pieces of beetroot, covered with snuff. In the morning, there are plenty of dead rabbits."

"Do they eat the snuff?" the storekeeper inquired in amazement.

"Eat it! no, they only smell it, and it makes them sneeze so much, that they break their necks."

"The reference to the breaking of necks," said Harper,

"reminds me how I served an owl a short time since. For three nights running the animal carried off a hen, and I had watched in vain. At length, early on the morning of the fourth day, it came flying to the house; it was raining a little. I was soon made aware of the fact by the commotion amongst the hens. I seized my rifle, and went out. I found that the owl was sitting in a low hickory bush, but I could only see its head, and as I did not wish to kill it, but to give the dogs some sport, I went round the bush trying to find a good spot to take aim. The leaves were equally thick on all sides, and the owl kept its large rolling eyes fixed upon me. I had gone round the tree three times, when all at once something rustled in the branches, and down came the owl. Hang me if she had not, by following me with her eyes, twisted her own neck off."

"There is nothing very strange in that," cried Bahrens, who did not seem to have the slightest doubt as to the truth of the story. "When I was a young fellow, I could run a race with any bustards, and if they began to fly, and did not rise too high, I was sure of catching them."

"As for running," said Harper, "I wish you had seen my brother chasing partridges."

"You do not mean to say that he caught them?" said Bahrens.

"No," replied Harper, "certainly not; but at every spring he got a handful of feathers out of their tails."

"Here comes the stew, gentlemen," said Roberts. "Thank you, Betsy, you have made it strong. No more water, thank you—it takes away the spicy perfume. Really, Bahrens, you were quite right; the bear's fat is an improvement. There is something so mild, yet fiery in it."

At this point the conversation ceased, while the group gave themselves up to the pleasures of the drink. At last Curtis broke the silence, and said, "Mrs. Roberts and Mr. Rowson ought to see that decent personage, Mr. Roberts, sitting here and drinking whisky-stew. They would make nice faces at him."

Roberts, who was already enjoying his third glass, and consequently beginning to feel the effects of the liquor, remarked, "Mr. Rowson may go—wherever he likes. This much I know, he shall not interfere in any of my affairs.

As far as my wife and daughter are concerned, he may do as he likes, or rather, as they like."

"I believe they agree in their tastes," said Curtis.

"I am afraid so. That bland sneaking fellow has always been a thorn in my side. He is for ever speaking ill of the Roman Catholics; I don't think there is much to choose between them."

"That Rowson is desperately in love with your daughter," said Curtis.

"Of course he is. They wish to have the affair settled in a month, and I have no objection."

"Listen, Roberts," said Bahrens; "I was once dreadfully in love with a towns-woman from St. Louis. I was then trading about the Missouri and the Yellow Stone river, and used to squat about three miles west of the city. Would you believe it? every third day I received a long letter, full of love and devotion, and the only pity was, that I could not read it, and as for the Indians with whom I lived, they did not know how to distinguish the outside from the inside of a letter. There must have been an amazing deal of love in those epistles. I tied them together when I went away, and put them into a bag; when, on my return home, I opened the bag, it contained nothing but ashes."

"Well, gentlemen, I think it is bed-time," said the storekeeper, yawning. "We must be up to-morrow at daybreak, and I really feel as if I was tired."

"It is getting late," said Roberts, stepping to the door and looking at the stars. "It must be past ten."

"Wait a minute," Harper cried. "As we are speaking of love, it reminds me of a story of something that happened to my brother, when he was quite a youngster. You should have known him; he was a sly dog. At eighteen he had already promised marriage to three girls. One day he went to a Quaker in Philadelphia, who strangely enough happened to be brother of one of these girls. The man recognised him, was very friendly, and invited him to dinner. After the meal, he got up, on the excuse of doing some business, and went and fetched a constable to have my brother taken up. What do you think he found on his return?"

"I suppose your brother had absconded?" said Bahrens.

"Yes, but not alone. He had cut away with the Quaker's wife."

"It is astonishing how that man can lie," said Bahrens, in a whisper to Curtis, who was standing near him.

"Let us to bed, then. Where shall we sleep, Bahrens?"

"You must settle that amongst yourselves. There are only three beds, and one of these belongs to the girls, the other to me and my good wife, and the third should be given to the two oldest men of the party, Roberts and Harper. After all these tales Harper will sleep well; and the other three gentlemen, Curtis, Hartfort, and Assowaum, will find skins enough to lie upon. That is right, Betsy, get the couches ready, and to-morrow we will rise with the dawn."

Assowaum, who had not spoken a single syllable all the evening, but seemed to have enjoyed the conversation very much, sipping his whisky, prepared to roll himself up in his blanket. As he approached the spot on which he wished to lie down, and passed close before the fire, he stumbled and nearly fell down.

"Hallo, Indian," said Harper, laughing, "have you taken too much whisky?"

"It is not good to take too much of anything," said the Feathered Arrow, stretching himself out, and rolling a log under his head, "but too much whisky is just enough;" and with this very philosophic remark, he turned upon his side, and in a few minutes had fallen asleep.

"Do you prefer any particular part of the bed?" asked Harper, when they had undressed.

"No," replied the other, quite unsuspiciously.

"Then you may get under it," said Harper, laughing, while he crept under the deer-skins with which it was covered.

Roberts did not, however, seem inclined to follow this advice, for he soon lay at Harper's side, and in a few moments nothing was heard but the crackling of the fire and the deep and regular breathing of the sleepers.

The night, with a single exception, passed quietly enough, when Curtis jumped up, and with a loud oath drove out all the dogs, which had gained admission one by one, and taken up their places near the hunting-party.

CHAPTER VIII.

MORNING IN THE LOG-HUT—EXAMINATION OF THE BLOOD-SPOTS—ASSOWAUM DIVES FOR THE CORPSE.

THE crowing of the cocks in the bushy peach-trees by which the log-hut was surrounded, announced the approach of day. From the wood the birds replied, and the friendly stars in the east began to grow paler. In the hut described in the last chapter, the three women—Mrs. Bahrens and her two daughters—arose, in order to be dressed before the others got up. They stepped cautiously over the sleeping hunters, and rekindled the dying embers. A cheerful flame soon blazed up, which was speedily nourished by fresh supplies of fuel. A large tin coffee-pot was placed on some embers raked out of the fire, and some hastily-prepared dough put to the fire to bake.

"I have told your father fifty times, I think," murmured Mrs. Bahrens, putting the roasted coffee-berries into a stone mortar and crushing them with the handle of the tomahawk —"I have told him fifty times to bring me a coffee-mill from Morrison's Bluff, or Little-rock; but he always forgets. He remembers all about his hunting materials; but if I want anything, I may ask a hundred times without producing any effect. He was over there yesterday again, and did not forget the whisky; but the coffee-mill——"

"Don't grumble, old woman," cried Bahrens from his bed —"don't grumble."

"It is true what I say."

"No, it is not," said Bahrens. "In that corner where the salt-cellar stands—more to the right—yes, there—what do you call that?"

"Bless me, a coffee-mill!" said Mrs. Bahrens; "yet you let me crush the berries here."

"How could I see what you were doing, with my eyes shut?"

"Listen, Roberts," said Harper, sitting up in bed. "You have monopolized the clothes. You are not at all impudent."

"Give me half of the bed, at any rate," said Roberts, half asleep.

"The half, indeed," said Harper; "but not taken out of the middle. In that case I should have to crouch on both sides to get my portion. That's not fair."

"Now, boys, get up," cried old Bahrens, stepping to the chimney and holding up his whisky-bottle; "here is the elixir of life—a comforter for the stomach."

This had the desired effect, and all jumped upon their feet with the exception of the Yankee storekeeper, who remained motionless, and snored as if the stillness of death reigned in the house.

Curtis shook him some time without making any impression, and at last remarked with an oath that the fellow was so long one could only wake him by degrees. As the rays of the sun tinged the tops of the trees, the men assembled round the breakfast-table; while the girls were engaged outside, feeding the horses and driving the pigs and hens away from the trough.

"Tell me, Bahrens," said Roberts, during the meal, "what about our pig-hunt? If we have to search for the traces of the murder, we must let the pigs alone, and then my old woman will begin to grumble."

"We must take another opportunity for doing that; and I fancy we shall find them all about two miles down the river, with the exception of those which have been devoured by the bears. The day before yesterday I saw a lot of swine with your mark upon them, and—I merely mention this by the way—among them that sow of your father's, Curtis, out of whose neck a bear had torn a piece of fat."

"Is that animal still alive?"

"Yes; and she had eleven nice pigs with her."

"The devil!" exclaimed Curtis. "Listen, Bahrens. Don't mention it; for I spoke to my governor yesterday about the sow, and he thinks that she is dead. I shall buy her of him 'as she runs in the wood'—that is, taking the chance of finding her. I shall get her for a silver dollar, and quietly drive her home."

"That's not a bad idea," returned Harper, laughing. "He means to cheat his own father."

"It is not cheating," the storekeeper replied. "If he can

make a dollar by honest means, he will not cheat anybody. His father is not obliged to see the sow."

"No Yankee would condemn such a proceeding," Bahrens, who had listened attentively to the discussion, observed. "But let us away, boys; the sun is up, and we must lose no time. If a murder has really been committed, it may still be possible to catch the guilty party; although it does not appear probable. I rode that way yesterday morning, and Mr. Brown must have passed in the same direction."

"Brown!" exclaimed Harper, suddenly, "Brown! How did he get in that part?"

"He said that he was going over to Morrison's Bluff."

"So he did; and if he came from the Fourche-la-Fave, it must have taken him out of the way. But let us go; we may get back by noon."

The men took leave of the women and rode through the ford, Assowaum sitting behind Harper, that he might get across, and thus proceed more quickly; and they all set off at a smart trot towards the place in which they had noticed the suspicious spots the day before.

"Stop," cried the Indian, springing to the ground; "this is the spot; you must go no further, or you will cut up the soil."

The hunters soon alighted, and fastened their horses to the wild vine, so that they could not break the bridles. Assowaum took the lead, stopping at the first trace. He examined it attentively, looking at every leaf and blade of grass; then rose again, and followed the trail with a light step to the commencement. He had not been long at this spot ere he uttered a deep guttural "waugh!" which attracted the hunters to his side. He pointed at the signs that had arrested his attention, which left no doubt that a bloody deed had been perpetrated. It was at the foot of an overthrown pine-tree, where brambles and thorny creepers formed a kind of maze; a horse had evidently gone round this little thicket, as the prints of a hoof led half-way round. Something—probably the murderer's bullet—had checked the career of the horseman; but the unfortunate man had not fallen at once to the ground—the horse had jumped aside.

"The bullet must have hit the horse," said Roberts, "or the rider would have fallen."

Assowaum silently pointed to a hickory-tree that stood near, on the light grey bark of which, about eight or nine feet from the ground, traces of blood were clearly visible.

"Indeed," cried Harper, horrified, "he hit that tree with his head; and here is the place where he fell down."

The soil was much trodden, and it was evident that the murdered man had struggled violently. The state of some branches showed that, in despair, he had clutched them, stripping off the leaves as they slipped out of his grasp. He had then fallen upon his knees. At this spot the dark blood-stains quite covered the ground, and he had fallen never to rise again. But no; here, again, where the red stream of life stained all the bushes, and quite bathed a neighbouring cypress-tree, another effort had been made. Under that cypress the victim had succumbed, and the dead body must have lain there some time, as might be seen from the impression it had left. The hunters stared in silence at these horrible evidences of foul play, for it was evident that no equal fight had occurred; at the best it must have been a desperate defence. The victim had been torn from his horse and murdered.

"Come," said Assowaum, following the trail to the bank of the river, and closely examining each foot-mark; "two persons carried the body."

"That much we discovered yesterday; the traces go down to the bank of the river."

"Here they rested; two men stood here some time. What is this? There is a knife, with marks of blood upon it."

"A penknife, by heavens! They cannot have killed the man with that."

"Show it to me," said Roberts, stretching out his hand. "Perhaps I may know who the owner is."

Harper stepped forward, and they both looked at it attentively.

"I never saw it before; it is quite a new one," Roberts exclaimed.

Harper did not know to whom it belonged, nor did any of the others.

"I will take care of it," said Harper, at last. "It may give us a clue to identify the villains. I shall wash off the stains of blood, they look so dreadful."

"What is that?" cried Assowaum, pointing to a spot in which the earth had been recently turned up, and which was not far from the place where the dead body had been put down.

"They have buried the body there," said the storekeeper.

"No such thing," returned Curtis, who had stepped nearer. "The hole is hardly large enough to bury an opossum, much less a man. They have been digging here, and with a large knife too; that much is certain, but the earth which they dug out has been removed. What can they have done with it?"

Assowaum examined the intermediate space attentively, and said, drawing himself up—"The air in a man's clothes will support his body in the water, and it will then hang on any projecting bush or tree; but when the body is filled with earth it sinks."

"Horrible! horrible!" exclaimed Roberts. "This explains the mystery of the small knife. They made an incision in the body with it. Gentlemen, this is a horrible deed; who can the unfortunate man have been?"

"The stream hides him," replied Harper, in a hollow tone of voice. "Who knows whether it will ever come to light? But what is the Indian doing? What are you at, Assowaum?"

"Making a rope to dive with," the Indian replied, peeling the bark from a small papao-tree and knitting it firmly together.

"In search of the body?" asked Roberts, with astonishment.

"Yes," replied the Indian, pointing to the knife which he held in his hand, "he is down there;" and saying this he divested himself of his clothes, and was about to spring into the water, when the storekeeper, who had watched his preparations narrowly, cried out—

"Stop; you will not be able to put that cord round the body, it will take too long a time—here is a hook;" and with these words he pulled from his pocket a parcel containing all kinds of fishing-tackle, from which he selected one of the largest fish-hooks, and gave it to the Indian.

"Waugh!" cried he with glee, making the hook fast to the strong papao-bark. He then looked for the spot at which

the body had been thrown into the river, and the next moment disappeared beneath the waters. The stillness of death reigned for several seconds; not one person in the group thought of uttering a word. The bubbles in the stream caused by Assowaum's plunge had ceased, for the river at this part was very deep, and only occasional air-bubbles showed where he was at work. His black glossy hair appeared suddenly above the surface, he breathed heavily, and struck out towards the shore where the men were standing. Then he climbed up the steep bank, still holding the hook in his hand.

"Where is the body?" asked Roberts.

"I felt it," was Assowaum's answer. "My hand touched it as I was groping; but the water lifted me up too quickly. It is certainly down there. Will one of you fetch me a stone?" he continued, after a short pause, sinking down exhausted under a tree. "I am tired, and should like to rest a little."

"Do you wish to make another attempt?" Harper inquired, with surprise.

The Indian only nodded his head, while Hartfort ran to a heap of stones, and, having selected one of the heaviest, gave it to Curtis, who tied it to a short rope, making it fast with a noose.

"There, Indian, if you hang that over your left wrist, it will sink you, and when you want to come up again, let go your hold. Look, in this manner."

The Indian did not require much instruction. He followed the white man's advice, leaving the end of the bark-cord in Curtis's hand, with only the fish-hook in his right, taking great care not to get his arms entangled. Gliding down the steep bank, again he disappeared in the river. This time he remained under the water much longer than on the first occasion, for, on account of the heavy weight he had with him, he was obliged to grope slowly along the bottom, feeling with his feet for the object of his search. At last there was a jerk at the rope, several air-bubbles arose, and once more the dark head of the Indian appeared. He struck out quickly towards the bank, rising from the water and looking back with horror. His face had assumed an ashy appearance, and as he pushed back his long curly hair, his eye

looked wild and wandering, as if he himself no longer belonged to this earth, as if he was the spirit of his tribe rising from the dark deep, because unwilling to share that watery grave with an enemy of his race.

"The rope is made fast," cried Curtis, who held the other end in his hand. "Assowaum has found the corpse."

While the Indian silently gazed at the surface of the water, the men on the bank of the river slowly and cautiously drew in the rope, taking care that it did not break. The body—to the dress of which the hook was attached—rose, and was soon visible above the water. The stream divided, and the next moment Assowaum took hold of the corpse by the shoulder and drew it on shore. The men had jumped down, and as the Indian turned it over, so that its pale face might be seen, a cry of terror arose from every lip. With one voice they exclaimed, "Heathcott!"

"Heathcott!" cried Harper again.

For several minutes the men stood still, silently contemplating the awful spectacle. The unfortunate man's body had been cut open and filled with earth and stones. There was a large wound over the forehead, and a bullet seemed to have pierced his breast. Roberts bent over the corpse, examining the latter.

"What sized bullet does Brown's rifle carry?" he asked, in a low tone of voice, as if afraid to pronounce his name before the corpse.

"Thirty," answered Harper.

Roberts pointed to the wound in the dead man's breast.

"Do you think him guilty?" said Harper, looking anxiously round the circle.

"Guilty! by heavens, no," answered Curtis. "No one in all Arkansas would give a verdict of guilty against him, after the threats which Smith told me this man breathed forth. I should have shot him myself. I am only sorry to see a strong-built fellow lying there, who could thus throw away his life, when he might have become a useful member of society. But a plague upon it; when such fellows, who are known to keep their word in quarrels and murders, say in plain terms that they will shoot a man wherever they meet him again, they deserve nothing better than a bullet. That is my opinion. He need not have cut the poor fellow

open; the buzzards would have done that quite as well, and much more quickly. Only see how they gather round us; this time they are mistaken. They will not be allowed to have this fellow for a banquet. We shall have to report the case. And are we to leave him here?"

"We must not remove the body," answered Roberts. "It is not allowed. The best plan will be to cover him with boughs, and report the case to the justice. He will send the constable to fetch the corpse. I do not wish to have anything more to do with the matter. What are you looking for, Hartfort?"

The storekeeper was kneeling down beside the corpse, examining very carefully the leathern hunting-shirt, which hung in damp folds over its breast.

"This man," he said, rising with great gravity, "carried in his pocket four hundred and seventy dollars in notes, all as good as silver. I saw them myself yesterday morning, in Bowitt's house, and he cannot have lost them, for the pocket is well secured. It has been torn open, and the money taken."

"Who dares to say that my nephew has committed a robbery?" cried old Harper, as the paleness of death stole over his countenance. He jumped up, drawing his knife from its sheath. "Who calls my William a thief?"

"Stop, Harper," said Roberts, soothingly, placing his hand upon his arm. "We have every reason to believe that Brown shot this Heathcott; but the money may have been taken by another; there were two persons engaged in the murder."

"Who could have been his companion?"

"Heaven knows; it is more than we can tell. Here are the footprints of two men, the one wearing boots, the other shoes; that much is certain; and while Brown was committing the deed of vengeance, the other may have found an opportunity for securing the money himself."

"Brown would not have suffered that."

"Certainly not, if he had happened to detect it. Be that as it may, the money was there; for when at my house he said that he had with him the purchase-money for three horses. Brown heard the remark; but I believe the young man to be too honest to commit such wrong. As I said before, no one knows who might have been his associate."

"It is horrible," Harper exclaimed, covering his face with his hands; and, quite overcome by his feelings, he reclined against a tree, at the foot of which sat Assowaum in a musing position, with his legs crossed, his head on his hand, and his elbow resting upon his knee.

"Let us begin our sad office," said Curtis, getting some boughs together. "I do not feel comfortable in these parts, and should not like to spend another hour at the side of that pallid face."

"That's right, Curtis," Roberts exclaimed, helping him to place over the corpse a rather heavy branch that was broken from its parent tree. "A few more like this, well arranged, will keep the ravens and buzzards away until the afternoon; and as for wolves, they are not likely to come this way in the daytime."

Curtis, Roberts, and Hartfort soon finished their work; having cut with their knives a quantity of branches, and formed a protection for the body; while Harper and Assowaum remained inactive. The sad duty was at last performed, and the men prepared to depart. Harper followed them, but almost unconsciously. The old man's strength seemed gone; he did not complain; but his pallid cheek, his fixed glance, too plainly showed what was passing within. He did not for a moment doubt that Brown was the murderer; indeed, this fact would not have rendered him odious in the sight of the Arkansas people. He knew how ready men are to think the worst of everything and everybody, even when no strong proofs of evil are to be found. In this case, an unsuspicious person could not help entertaining fears. It was, indeed, terrible.

Harper got into the saddle and allowed the animal to go in which direction it pleased. He did not even notice that the Indian remained in his sitting posture at the foot of the tree.

For some time after the others had disappeared in the thicket, Assowaum sat looking intently upon the ground; but when the last sound of the retreating steps of his companions had died away, he got up suddenly, and once more commenced examining the tracks and marks. With a small knife which he carried in his belt, he marked upon his tomahawk the exact length and breadth of the footprints; then,

convinced that nothing had escaped him, he shouldered his rifle and plunged into the thick forest, in quite the opposite direction to that taken by the hunters.

CHAPTER IX.

A BUSINESS AFFAIR—ROWSON'S INDIGNATION AT THE MURDER, AND MARION'S WEAKNESS.

We must now once more conduct the reader to the thicket at which the story opened. On the same morning in which the hunting-party at the Petite-Jeanne fished the dead body out from the river, the four associates met at the usual place, in order to arrange their plan. Cotton and Weston were the first to reach the spot. Johnson and Rowson did not keep their associates long waiting, and on their arrival were welcomed by the two others with a joyful "Hurrah!"

"Silence; hush!" said Rowson, quietly; "don't make as much noise as if you were on the county road, and did not care who heard you."

"Well, I really do not care," answered Weston; "what would it matter if we were found here together, after all?"

"To you not much, probably; but my mother-in-law is a remarkably pious woman, and would not think it a very great honour if she discovered that I numbered you two amongst my friends and acquaintances."

"Your mother-in-law!" exclaimed Cotton, astonished. "Just tell me, Rowson, is it true, what people say, that you think of marrying old Roberts's daughter? I heard the report, but could not bring myself to believe it."

"Why not, Mr. Cotton? This is the last piece of business we shall do together. I mean to become an honest man."

"High time that you did, no doubt," replied Cotton, laughing; "almost a little too late, I should say. But heaven be merciful to the poor girl!"

"I beg, Mr. Cotton, to protest against this impertinence on your part. This is a point upon which I cannot allow vulgar jesting."

"Peace!" cried Johnson; "we have not come here to permit these bickerings. Our business is serious. What was the result of your hunting expedition, Cotton?"

"Four stags and one fox."

"You might have spared that poor fox. And yours, Weston?"

"Two stags and three bustards."

"Then I have lost," said Johnson; "though I might plead as an excuse that I fell yesterday morning from one of those steep ridges; I mean to say that a stone gave way, and I slipped. I scratched my arm, and the accident, though slight, has of course interfered with my success in hunting."

"Hold—no more on that subject!" exclaimed Weston; "if such excuses were to be taken into account, a man might plead that his horse had fallen lame when about to start on a race."

"Where have you put your skins?" Johnson asked, ill-humouredly.

"They are hanging up at Cotton's hut. If you will not take my word for it, come with me; but I should think——"

"Very well—it is all right—I was only joking. Rowson and myself, then, are to lead off the dance. Good gracious! what an uproar it will create in the settlement! Only let us have four-and-twenty hours' start, and all Arkansas wont find the animals again. Rowson has hit upon an excellent plan. Above all things, don't forget the place, near Hoswell's canoe. On the appointed evening, it will be your care, Weston, to keep your horses in that dilapidated cot on the Horsecreek. Leave as few tracks as possible. You know well enough how to manage that cleverly."

"Where shall I have to wait in the meantime?" Cotton inquired. "I should not like to remain idle long. Oh, I know, I can go and pay Atkins a visit; and I can rest there a little."

"There is game enough in that part of the country, so you will not stand in want of meat," said Johnson.

"How about the Regulators?"

"They may go to the devil. They will never get scent; the opportunity will have passed away, and with all their wisdom they will have wasted their time. No doubt there will afterwards be a great stir in this part of the county.'

"If my plan succeeds," said Rowson, "the Regulators will not be in a position to do us much harm; they will run upon a false scent, and if one of those dogs goes wrong, the whole pack will follow, yelping and making a great outcry. It would be a capital joke to make fools of them, more particularly that swaggering fellow Heathcott."

"Well, we will do our best; but when do you mean to break up?"

"At once," cried Johnson; "the sooner it is done, the better. The Regulators are beginning to hold their meetings again, and if the whole county is once fairly aroused by that cursed Heathcott and his fellows, it will then be much too late for us to begin our business."

"At any rate, I must call once more upon Roberts before anything is done," said Rowson, "and that shall be this very morning. It wont take me out of my way at all. Johnson, in the meanwhile, can go across the wood, and we will meet again at the sources of the Cypress-brook, near the spot on which the red beech-tree stands."

"We are to lead the way then?" Johnson observed.

"Of course," replied Rowson; "that is to say, there; but not back again."

"No, I hope not," observed Cotton; "and now, boys, good-bye. I will hasten to my work."

"When will you be at the place of meeting?" asked Weston. "I should not like to stay long in that part with the horses."

"At any rate, I shall not be there before Friday evening," replied Rowson; "that is, if no obstacle upsets our plans. We cannot reach the place on foot before Thursday evening; and if we do not then find an easy opportunity, we shall no doubt be detained as late as Saturday. I hope, however, that everything will run smoothly; and then on Friday evening we shall be at the appointed place. In that case I hope to see you again soon."

"Good-bye," said Cotton and Weston, disappearing amongst the bushes.

Rowson followed them with his eyes for some time, and then said to his companion, with a shake of his head—

"Johnson, this must be the last time that we undertake anything in concert with that fellow Cotton. The people at

the island do not wish to have anything to do with him. They have discovered that he is addicted to drink, and when in that state he lets out all sorts of dangerous things, and is apt to be quarrelsome."

"That young fellow Weston is not much more to my taste," replied Johnson; "I believe that if he finds himself in a scrape one of these days he will blab. I do not trust him."

"Let us hope that his discretion will not be put to trial," Rowson observed, very gravely. "Who knows what any of us would do in such a case? There must be something very tempting in the idea of being able to save one's own skin by sacrificing that of a few others. With us two the case is of course different; I do not think that a certain person's evidence would do either of us much good, and where——"

"The less we say about that the better," Johnson observed very quietly, looking at the priming of his gun. "Where shall we find the horses?"

"At Fulweal's—Weston knows that already, and will be there to fetch them."

"Well, then, you may go straight to the county road, and follow it. I will keep in the wood. It is better we should not be seen together."

"Good luck to you, till we meet again."

"Thank you—the same to you."

Rowson reached the place where his horse was fastened, mounted quickly, and trotted towards the road. On reaching this he gave his horse the rein, and the animal galloped along, until his owner saw from afar the bright roof of a peaceful dwelling, where his sweetheart lived. He immediately checked the speed of the animal, approached the house at a quieter pace, and dismounted at the door. Although received by Mrs. Roberts with joy, and by Marion with kindness, he did not stay long with them, but told them that he had merely come to say good-bye for a few days, being partly induced by his calling to travel over the northern part of the county, in order to preach the word; and partly compelled by private business to go to the Arkansas river, in order to receive a portion of the money which he expected.

"Soon, my dear Marion," he exclaimed, taking the hand of the girl tenderly, while she turned rather pale; 'soon

the most ardent wish of my soul will be gratified; and we shall, by the help of Heaven, have one home. It is not good for man to be alone. The wandering life I now lead does not suit my health; moreover, from being so much on horseback, I am often compelled to seek shelter in places in which I would rather not be seen."

"The men of Arkansas," whispered Marion, "like to sleep in the open air. Does Mr. Rowson object to that?"

"Oh no, dear Marion; but it does not agree with me. I have passed the years of early youth, and need not look for difficulties and hardships any one can avoid. But farewell, dear child, may Heaven take you under its protection! Before we separate let us once more pray that our exertions may meet with a blessing."

Having said this, Rowson brought forth his little black-bound prayer-book, which he always kept in his pocket, and began praying in a loud voice. The women knelt down; but Marion's thoughts carried her far, far away. She did not listen to the rough voice of the preacher, who seemed to repeat the phrases from his prayer-book with as much feeling as the organ-grinder listens to his own tunes. Her gaze was fixed upon the blue dome of heaven; and while her lips touched her small and delicate fingers, her heart communed with her Creator.

"Rub the horses down a little; in another hour I must start again," said Roberts, outside, to the negro. "Come in a moment, Harper, and rest yourself. What do you want at home now? Come, I am tired myself, and long for a little repose. But—halloo!—there is another prayer-meeting," he continued, in an undertone, turning to his friend; "the deuce take that preacher! That man cannot find anything in the world to do but to walk upon his knees; I wonder whether this is really pleasing to Heaven! Tom, go and get us two chairs out of the house," he continued, in a louder voice, addressing the negro, who was busily engaged removing the saddles from the horses.

Rowson, who had heard the noise made by the arrival of the two men, finished his prayers earlier than he had intended, and just as the negro boy entered the room, the ceremony terminated. Roberts and Harper entered without any more ado.

"Good morning, ladies," said Harper. He looked pale and exhausted; his eyes were sunk in their sockets, his knees could hardly bear the weight of his body, and he sank back into a chair.

"Mr. Harper, what in Heaven's name is the matter with you?"

"Nothing; I think it will soon pass away. May I ask you to give me a glass of water?"

Marion took the pumpkin which lay near the water-bucket, and handed it to the old man.

"A murder has been committed," said Roberts, drawing his chair to the chimney. "A murder—a horrible murder! —Heathcott has been killed."

"Heathcott!" cried Rowson, looking up with amazement. "Heathcott! who told you so?"

"I saw his corpse myself," said Roberts. "Brown killed him. What is the matter with that girl? Marion, nonsense! Why need she faint away at hearing of a murder? —it is not the first by a good many she has heard of."

Harper approached him as he was speaking, and said—"Do not mention the money; let us first see whether we cannot find some trace of the other criminal."

"Do not fear," replied Roberts; "I feel certain that on that score Brown is quite innocent."

Rowson stood still for some moments, as if absorbed by pious and reverential thoughts. At last he raised his eyes with a sigh, and said—"It is horrible!—horrible!—that one so young should be both a murderer and a robber already."

"A robber!" exclaimed Harper, starting up wildly.

"Did not Heathcott mention here that he carried a large sum of money about with him? Do you believe his murderer has buried the money with the body?"

Marion looked anxiously at her father, as if expecting him to make some reply. But Roberts was silent, and remained gazing silently into the chimney fire.

"Heathcott was a sinful man," continued Rowson; "and it is horrible that he should die thus—perish in his sins—it is indeed terrible! Where was the awful deed committed, Mr. Roberts?"

"We found the traces at the Petite-Jeanne, and Assowaum brought up the body out of the river."

The preacher was silent for several minutes, and, lost in thought, gazed upon the ground. Then he rose suddenly, and with his eye fixed upon Roberts asked—"But how do you know that Brown is the murderer?"

"He was seen that very morning in that part of the country," Roberts replied, with a sigh; "and two were concerned in the murder. Moreover, Brown had a quarrel with the murdered man the day before the deed was committed, and on that occasion Heathcott breathed terrible threats against him."

"Shameful!—infamous!" exclaimed Rowson, in pious indignation. "I will go myself to the Petite-Jeanne; perhaps the murderer may yet be caught."

"It was on your account, Mr. Rowson, that the unhappy young man commenced the quarrel with him who is now dead," said Marion, looking steadfastly at her intended. "You, therefore, least of all, should judge him rashly or hastily."

"Marion!" exclaimed her mother, annoyed at the boldness of one generally so quiet. "Marion, how dare you?"

"Let the child alone, sister Roberts," replied Rowson, mildly; "she judges according to outward appearances. Do not blame her; God alone sees the heart, and can probe it."

"It would not do you much good even if you were to catch my nephew," said Harper, rising angrily. "We are all ready to swear to the threats Heathcott poured forth against him. A jury would and must give a verdict of *not guilty.* Besides, he is to return in a week, and then he will defend himself."

"He will return?" asked Rowson, quickly.

"Heaven be praised! then he is innocent!" exclaimed Marion, in the joy of her heart.

"Miss Marion seems to take great interest in that young man," Rowson observed.

"In every innocent person," replied the young girl, blushing slightly at the eagerness with which she had advocated the young man's cause.

"That is good and proper," replied the preacher, kindly. "May the Lord bless you for it, my dear child, and preserve you in your pious belief. You have not had such bitter

experience as we have; and Heaven grant that you never may."

Having said this, Rowson stepped up to Mrs. Roberts, whispered something in her ear, kissed his intended respectfully upon her forehead, and followed Roberts and Harper, who, after saying farewell, had mounted their horses again.

Rowson got upon his little fiery pony, and rode slowly down the large road, which led through the fields of maize to a narrower path. The latter ran in a north-westerly direction towards the Arkansas river.

"Mother," said Marion, after a painful pause, when they were once more alone—"Mother, I cannot love that man. My heart knows nothing of that affection which I should have to promise at the altar."

"Child!" exclaimed the matron in amazement, seizing her daughter by the hand, "say your prayers; nothing in the world has so good an effect as a fervent prayer when the tempter approaches. You know that we have both given our word to Mr. Rowson. You know that all his happiness is bound up in you; and at the side of such a pious man you will surely attain that purity of soul, of which you now stand in so much need. Mr. Rowson, as he just told me, entertains strong hopes of getting his affairs in order before the appointed period, and in a fortnight the wedding can take place. Be dutiful as you have always been, and you will be as happy as you deserve."

At these words Marion fell upon her mother's breast, and wept bitterly.

CHAPTER X.

ELECTION OF A SHERIFF AT PETTYVILLE—THE PURSUERS UPON THE RIGHT TRACK.

It was election day at Pettyville. A sheriff and clerk were to be appointed for the county, and three candidates had already come forward for the first, and two for the second of these appointments. One was a thriving farmer from the neighbourhood, Kowler by name, who had made himself very agreeable to the electors by giving them a dinner on

the 4th of July, the anniversary of the declaration of American independence. He always carried a small flask of whisky in one pocket and a piece of tobacco for chewing in the other, and he was said to be very liberal with both of them wherever there was the least chance of getting a vote. The second was a German who had resided many years in America, and kept a store a little higher up the river. The third was a farmer belonging to Arkansas—one who had before filled the office, but had not been re-elected, because he drank rather more freely than even his very indulgent fellow-citizens deemed proper. Three times a week they would allow him to indulge, but every day seemed to them too much. It was, however, pretended that he had reformed, and accordingly many votes were promised to him. Vattel, such was his name, was a very good-natured sort of a fellow, who enjoyed his joke, never got angry at a trick played upon him, and also knew how to support the dignity of his office in case of need.

Two o'clock had been fixed upon for the commencement of the polling, and the farmers and hunters who had already arrived, and were assembled round the little hut, where a table was set out covered with writing materials, passed the time as well as they could. It was one of the ordinary kind of log-houses, with a bed in one corner and a table in another. Rifles hung from the walls. On all the nails, or rather pegs (for there was not much iron in the house), pouches and powder-horns were suspended. Several backwoodsmen were reclining, some on blankets, some on the rough deals, conversing with great animation on affairs relating to pasture, hunting, and the gold-diggings that had then been recently discovered in the hills of the Fourche-la-Fave.

The most characteristic group consisted of several men reclining near the bed. Upon it, his left foot touching the ground, sat the long lean figure of a man, in a rather old light blue frock-coat of worsted stuff. The back was, however, made of quite a different material from that of which the sleeves and collar were composed. On his head he wore an old felt hat, with holes cut in three different places for purposes of ventilation. A similar experiment had been tried upon his shoes, though the cutting operation appeared to have been made not so much on account of fresh air as

of corns; and his trousers, fastened round his knees by sundry leathern straps, looked as variegated as a map of the United States, of which it was Robin's proud boast to be a free-born citizen. An old dilapidated leathern pouch hung at his right side, and a very little knife with a wooden handle was stuck in his belt, by which the aforesaid trousers were prevented from separating themselves entirely from a body to which they seemed to have taken so strong an aversion.

Notwithstanding his very independent exterior—if the word independent may be used with regard to a man who seemed to hold everything by a very frail tenure—he appeared to sit quite comfortably on his by no means easy seat, and struck the cords of a violin in so rough a manner, that the dogs, which were sunning themselves outside the hut, got up in dismay, evidently in a dilemma whether to leave the good sunny place, or to listen to the screaming noise any longer. The men in the interior of the hut did not care about the ear-distressing sounds. They chatted and laughed, and did not pay any attention to the player. To this there was, however, one exception, and that was a young farmer, who, with all the signs of greatest ease and comfort, lay stretched at full length on the bed, with his feet towards the player. He seemed to take a particular interest in the musical performance of the artist, who, on his side, was quite absorbed by his intense exertions. This strange auditor followed the tune by whistling to it, though in quite a different key. The player confined his efforts to one and the same air, and had played it over and over again for the fiftieth time, when even his patient auditor grew tired of it, and giving this second Paganini a gentle knock with his foot, in order to be sure of attracting his attention, exclaimed—

"It is too bad, Robin. I have been lying here half-an-hour, and am compelled to keep whistling the same tune. Do you know nothing else? Well, that's right. 'Yankee Doodle!'"—and, falling back upon his cushion, he began whistling the new tune with all his might.

"What is the last news about the dead body?" asked a farmer from the mouth of the Fourche-la-Fave. "I have heard nothing more about it."

"Well, nothing further has been done," replied another.

"The men who found it covered it over with branches, and then all of us went out to endeavour to discover the trail in order to detect the other fellow who had a hand in the game. But you know that there was such a dreadful rain in the afternoon, that nothing further could be done."

"Then it was Brown, after all, who shot him?"

"Certainly," said the justice of the peace, joining the group. "That is plain enough. Who could put up with such horrid threats? I should like to find out who his accomplice was. That fellow, at least, had no provocation, and one really does not know who it could be."

"The Indian did a very capital thing in diving as he did, and hooking out the dead body. I don't know how much they would have had to give me, in order to induce me to do such a thing."

"Those Red-skins are accustomed to such work. Had it not been for him we should never have found out who the victim was, for nobody would have guessed Heathcott."

"If the Indian had not behaved so well in the matter, I should have suspected him," said the judge. "Brown and the Red-skin are hand and glove together. In this case, however, it seems that they could not have been confederates, or Assowaum would have taken care not to bring up the dead body from the bottom of the river; for by so doing he would have raised a witness against himself and his friend."

"Have the Regulators chosen another leader yet?"

"They were to meet last Sunday at Bourth's to talk everything over. It appears they have found some tracks in this neighbourhood."

"I wonder whether it is true that Heathcott was robbed as well as murdered?"

"He had some money with him that morning, that much I know," said Cook, the man reclining upon the bed, who left off whistling for a minute. "Money he had, I am sure. He carried it in a little red leathern pocket-book, fastened inside his hunting-shirt. It was not found on the body, of course—the murderers had taken care of it."

"Brown had nothing to do with the theft, I will swear to that," said the judge. "I believe Brown to be an honest fellow; and I am rather astonished that he should seek

any assistance in putting that boasting fellow out of the way."

"Robin," said Cook from the bed, turning partly round and giving his friend another knock with his foot—"Robin, if you do not soon leave off your 'Yankee Doodle,' I shall really fetch the dogs in to help you. Do you know nothing but these two pieces?"

Robin commenced playing "Washington's March," and Cook was quiet again.

"Gentlemen," the judge exclaimed, "it is now time for us to begin—it must be two o'clock. We want a secretary; who amongst the present company can serve as such? You, Cook, eh? You can write?"

"Yes, my own name, but as I am not on the list of candidates it would hardly be worth my while to exercise my knowledge."

"Smith, you then? or Hopper, or Moor? What the deuce! can none of you keep a register?"

"There comes Hecker, the German—he can write," said Robin, pointing with his bow to the open door.

"Here! Hecker," cried the judge, "have you an hour to spare to keep our election list?"

"Yes, two or three," replied the new comer, stepping in the doorway. "I only wish to be at the salt-pool on the other side of the mountain by dark. If I leave here at five I shall be able to get there in good time."

"Well, then, put your rifle in the corner. Is it loaded?"

"Do you think I would carry an empty reed about with me?"

"Well, put it in a place of safety. I am always afraid of these accursed things doing some harm."

Hecker, a young German, as any one might perceive from his appearance, gained a living in that part of the country by the chase. He took from its sheath his large and broad hunting-knife, which incommoded him in sitting, put it down on the table before him, and said to Smith, who sat near him, "Is it quite impossible to induce either Robin or Cook to cease that horrible music of theirs? The dogs will certainly get sick of it."

"It would be rather difficult," the other replied, laughing; "they both of them believe it to be first-rate. Hallo, there

comes Wells! what can bring him here? He does not care about elections."

"He has been killing wolves," exclaimed the judge. "Well done, Wells, that is good of you—the animals do harm enough."

"Good evening to all," said the hunter, stepping into the cottage and throwing the wolves' heads on the table. "Good evening, judge; there—give me the certificate,* or rather buy them of me; for I have not many taxes to pay that I know of."

Wells was a slender, well-made man, with grey lively eyes. In other respects he was much more like an Indian than a white man, and many declared that there was as much of the former as of the latter in his veins. His dress also resembled that worn by the half-civilized red race of the wilderness. Like them, he walked bare-headed, his long black glossy hair flowing round his shoulders. When the weather was very bad he bound a strip of bark round his temples in order to tie it up. Strange and romantic tales were told of his mode of life, especially in latter years, which he had spent chiefly in Texas. At the time of which he is introduced to our readers, he was living quietly and upon a well-cultivated farm, which, with the aid of his two sons, lads of eleven and nine years of age, he farmed. He only worked in the summer, and then only during the few weeks of planting time. The rest of the year he followed the chase, and set traps for the denizens of the forest, more particularly wolves. Otherwise he was a harmless kind of a fellow, and a favourite in all the country on account of his friendly, though rather rude disposition, as well as of his unlimited hospitality.

"Listen, Wells," said Hecker, laughing, wiping off with his sleeve the wolf's blood from the sheet of paper; "if you do not mind particularly, you may as well put these wet things *under* the table; it will enable one to write more comfortably."

"Oh, I have dirtied the paper, have I? I am really very sorry. Well, you can write upon it for all that; it is only

* In Arkansas three dollars premium is given for every wolf's head. This is not, however, paid in cash, but by a certificate, which is received in lieu of money in liquidation of taxes.

that corner that is soiled. Here, judge, three times three make nine."

"Yes; nine dollars for three wolves' heads; that is just enough. But you must first swear that you have killed them yourself, and in this county."

"I cannot do that, then; for I only caught them, and my dogs worried them to death."

"It is all the same, whether they were killed by your own hand, by your dogs, or by your traps; swear to that."

"Well, I will be hanged if it is not true."

"Now, really," exclaimed Cook, from the bed, giving Robin another knock with his foot, "that deserves the 'Yankee Doodle.'"

"My dear Wells," said the judge, smiling, "that is not the regular kind of oath. But the clerk will see to the matter. At present we must attend to our election. Hecker, you will write; and who are my two fellow-committeemen?—aha!—Smith and Hawkes—sit down; we can begin now."

"What is the day of the month?" asked Hecker.

"The twenty-seventh."

"And what day of the week?"

"Well, bless me, don't you know that? It is Friday."

"By dwelling in the forest a few weeks one soon loses all calculation with respect to these things," said Hecker. "I thought it was Sunday."

One of the farmers now stepped forward. Hecker wrote down the name.

"Good evening, Heslaw; he does not require any particular proof of qualification, does he?"

"No; not he."

"For whom do you vote as sheriff?"

"Vattel."

"And as clerk?"

"Hopper."

"Robin, pray stop that noise," said the judge, somewhat impatiently; "it sounds frightfully."

"I have no resin," said Robin, quietly, and without disturbing himself. "Smith, just reach under the table, if you please; on one of its legs hangs a little leather pouch; there must be some in it."

"Oh, you had better give up your fiddling altogether; it makes one's head ache."

"You may keep your ears shut if you don't want to hear it. The deuce take you!" said Robin, quite incensed, leaving the room in anger.

"Your name?" asked Smith of another who approached the table in order to vote.

"Cattlin."

"How long have you been in the State?"*

"Seven months."

"And how long in the county?"

"Eight weeks."

"Can you swear to these assertions?"

"Oh, yes."

"Take his oath, clerk."

The formula was repeated to the voter in a rapid manner, and he was at the same time presented with the Bible to kiss. The ceremony ended with the usual and solemn "So help you God."

"He stands very much in need of his aid," said Cook, yawning, and turning round on the bed.

The election went on thus, at certain intervals, for about two hours. All present had recorded their votes; and the two clerks were just about closing the register by appending their own names, when the crowd outside announced old Bahrens, who came trotting along on his little pony.

"Just in time, gentlemen," he exclaimed, stepping into the room. "Just in time! Hurrah for Vattel! That's the man, boys! True enough, he takes his glass sometimes; but there is no harm in that; and he soon is all right again. Write down Vattel, I say."

"It was high time you came, Bahrens," observed Hecker. "I was just going; it is past five o'clock, and I have got half an hour's walk."

"Where are you bound?"

"To the nearest salt-pool. Will you go with me?"

"Oh, the deuce take your salt-pool! We will remain here together; is it not so, boys? This evening we will have a spree. I sha'n't go home until—until I can no longer

* In order to be entitled to vote, a residence of six months in the State, and of six weeks in the county, is required.

walk; and then I shall be more likely than ever to stay where I am."

"That is right, Bahrens," said Cook, who had stepped to the table; "that's what I like. I have brought two deer-skins; we will turn them into drink. We can't have a dry election. Haven't *you* shot anything?"

"I? no! But I witnessed a chase this afternoon which has taken all the pleasure of shooting out of me. Stop, Hecker, that story you must hear; you will still be in time for your precious salt-pool. Besides, you are certain not to shoot anything."

"Well, what was it?"

"You mean that I have just seen? Only think. About an hour ago I came to the Fourche-la-Fave, up there where the steep cliffs are. I saw an eagle flying in circles over the water. I stood still, and got ready for a shot, for I thought he might come within reach of my gun; and when they hover in the air, beating it with their wings, one can get a pretty good aim. All at once, down comes the eagle like lightning, beats the water for a moment with his large wings, then rises again with an eel in his beak."

"Well, there is nothing wonderful in that. I have seen that often."

"Stop; don't be in such a hurry, you gentleman from the other side of the great water. Let me finish, if you please, and you will then perceive whether this is a wonderful thing or not. I grant that it is not very extraordinary that an eagle should catch an eel; and if one is always either out in the forest, or hanging about the rivers and lakes, one may witness the same often enough. But listen. The eagle rose higher and higher, taking the eel with it, which it at last swallowed. Now, thought I, the matter is done with, so I put down the hammer of my rifle, and shouldered it; when all of a sudden—upon my word, it is true—the eel again appeared out of the eagle's beak. The latter did not at first observe this; but on catching sight of its prey, it went immediately in pursuit—you may well look astonished—and before the fish could reach the water, had caught it again."

"Bahrens!" exclaimed the judge, interposing.

"You think that's all?" the other continued, not heeding the interruption. "The eel and the eagle did not agree

with each other very well. As soon as the latter thought he had fairly swallowed his slippery prey, it made its escape, and——"

"And what was the end of all this?" asked Hecker, laughing.

"What was the end? Do you think I have nothing else to do but to watch such goings on all the afternoon, and to endeavour to ascertain whether an eagle can digest an eel? I left them at the struggle, and came away."

"May I go now?" Hecker inquired, slyly.

"Go—if you like—with your sneering face. Now, boys, who will fetch some whisky? I don't like sitting down in the store over there; it is not comfortable. Hecker, come and take a good draught, for watching near a salt-pool the whole night is no joke. Upon my word, I can never manage to shoot deer in broad daylight. I shall give up the attempt soon. Staying out in the wood during the night, with a fire at hand at which I may not even warm myself, is rather disagreeable. To be always in fear of falling asleep, and of letting my fire go out in the meantime, while some stag comes to the salt-pool and hears me snoring—that is not exactly to my taste. Well, I wont hinder you; you may have your own way. I shall not nurse you, if you fall ill; but stop—wait and hear how I fared once at a salt-pool in Texas."

"Be quick about it," said Hecker, shouldering his rifle. "I should not like to lose any time."

"It would indeed be a pity. If you should happen to escape the thunderstorm which is rising over yonder, you would no doubt regret it. But listen. I was out one night—at that time I was just such another fool as Hecker is now, and used to stay out day and night, with my rifle, watching at some salt-pool. There was plenty of game in the neighbourhood, and I went to the place somewhat early, as I was anxious to get together a fair number of skins by night. Before daybreak, I was crouching down near a good lump of pine-wood, under a hastily-constructed shelter. All at once, and at no great distance, I heard a horrible noise and outcry, as if several thousands of panthers had set up a howl in the wood. In fact, instead of hearing the noise, I might, perhaps, with more accuracy say I felt it, and—but I

must first observe that I was about a mile from a large cotton-field in a very low, swampy part of the country. To return to my story. Before I had recovered my senses, it flew past, and came down upon me like a thunderstorm. What do you think it was?"

"It would be impossible to guess."

"Why, wild geese; there were some thousands, to speak within bounds. They broke down my tent, put out the fire I had only just before succeeded in lighting with the greatest difficulty, and did not seem to pay more attention to me than if I had never existed. I was not idle; I took out my hunting-knife, and began to lay about me right and left. Those nearest to me perceived that they had made a mistake. It was, however, too late, for before they had fairly recovered from their fright, and could utter a cry of alarm, I had decimated them. When the remainder of the flock flew away, I counted fifty-one geese, and fifty-eight heads which had been left behind."

"What! seven heads more than bodies? where then were the geese?"

"Those to which the heads belonged? I found them on the morrow. They had come in so close together, that the dead birds had been carried with the living a good way—that is to say, about five hundred paces. Good night, Hecker! good night! How that fellow runs! and how he throws his legs about!"

"Bahrens, you are still the same," said the judge, laughing. "You talk nothing but nonsense, and you can draw the long-bow still."

"What's the use of my telling a story if you do not believe a word of it? what do you keep your mouths open for? Here comes the whisky at last."

"It arrives very opportunely just after Bahrens's story," said Curtis. "I should like to tell you what happened to me last night. It is true, upon my word, and you need not grin, Bahrens."

"Now do I ever make excuses and apologies before commencing my stories? No, that only creates suspicion," said Bahrens, with a nod of his head.

"You do not stand in need of such aids," the judge observed, laughing; "all comes the same to you; but go on, Curtis, go

on, and be so kind as to leave a drop of that stuff in the tumbler."

"Yesterday evening I was over at the Petite-Jeanne," Curtis began, "looking after the pigs, of which Bahrens told us a short time since—the very animals, indeed, we were in pursuit of when we discovered the body. Well, I kept crawling about the bush all day, and I saw plainly enough where they had been rubbing up the ground, but I could not find any of them. At last, towards evening, when it was growing dark, I caught a glimpse of some light object in a little papao thicket, and it turned out to be the old sow with her pigs. I only saw ten, Bahrens, although you spoke of eleven; perhaps the bears have taken one. Having ascertained that she really bore father's mark on her ears—a hole in the right, and a slash in the left one—I let them alone, not wishing to disturb them, more especially as nothing could be done with them that evening; I threw them some Indian corn which I had brought in my pouch, and I looked about for some comfortable resting-place.

"I never could bear the Petite-Jeanne swamp, it is so wet and disagreeable. Mosquitoes abound there; one can scarcely see through the swarms. After a long search I found a dry place, lighted a fire, wrapped myself in my blanket, and laid down. I had not taken the dogs with me, because I did not wish to frighten the pigs, nor had I any intention of hunting. Being regularly tired out, I soon fell asleep. How long I may have slept I do not know, for the trees stood so thick that I could hardly catch a glimpse of a few stars between the branches. All at once I awoke, and I fancied that something was creeping about me. I listened long and attentively, cocked my rifle and drew it near me, but as I could hear nothing further, I at last felt persuaded that I had been dreaming, and I laid down again. I could not, however, get rid of the strange feeling, and not having my dog, I was by no means in a very agreeable situation, more especially if by chance an old panther should have tried to give me a hug, just as one did Dissolt not long ago on the Washita. Half asleep, half awake, I lay listening for the slightest noise; when, suddenly, I thought that I heard the same sounds again. I took the handkerchief from my face very quietly, and I fancied I heard some one breathing hard very near, and

the next moment I felt the hot breath of some living being upon my face. By the dim light I perceived a black object bending over me; and what with fright and surprise, I really remained motionless for several seconds. It could not be a panther, that much I knew; for that animal would have taken my life long before. I could not form any distinct idea; I did not even remember the knife in my belt, which would at least have enabled me to make some kind of defence. There I lay motionless like a dead man, keeping my eye fixed upon the dark object just above me, whose brilliant eye I could distinguish even through the gloom. I am not generally easily frightened. But here I was, like one charmed, and so powerless, I must have fallen a prey to any animal that might have wished to have a taste of my flesh."

"Well, what was it, after all?" the group inquired with one voice.

"All of a sudden I again caught a glimpse of the stars above me, and no longer felt the hot breath. Soon after, I heard the steps of my visitor retiring in the distance. It was evident that he had left me, and I breathed as freely as if I had risen from the dead."

"Did your fire still burn?"

"Only very faintly, as the wood I had got the evening before was not quite dry."

"What did you do afterwards?"

"I do not remember all the particulars. At first I thought of getting up and stirring the fire; then I wanted to draw my knife from its sheath, and put it at my side, or keep it in my hands; then I wished to lean my back against a tree. I do not know how it was, but I did none of these things; I fell asleep again, and when I awoke it was bright day."

"That *is* strange," said the judge; "what could your visitor have been? Did you not look for the tracks?"

"*Strange!*" Bahrens muttered. "I should have told that story, and you would have declared that it was nonsense and lies: another tells it, and it is merely *strange*."

"Of course I looked for the tracks," replied Curtis, "but I did not discover anything; the ground was dry, and the leaves lay very thick. At some distance from the spot I

came upon the tracks of an uncommonly large bear, and that must have been my nocturnal friend."

"That is just what those beasts do," said Smith, laughing; "I know it by experience; for, two years ago, I kept a tame bear. Several times he rose in the middle of the night, came to my couch, and looked straight into my face. They are funny animals, those bears."

"That reminds me, Curtis," said the judge, "you promised to catch a young bear for me this spring; my wife very much wants to have one. Don't you intend to do it? or is the season past?"

"Yes, it is indeed too late; in May the little wretches run as fast as horses. For six weeks in February and March I watched on that errand; I even went over twice to the mountains, to look in some holes I know, but could find none. I should like to have a little tame Bruin myself, they are so amusing."

"Nonsense," said Bahrens; "they soon grow clumsy. The first year they throw the vessels and earthen-ware from the shelves, draw the cloth off the table with everything upon it, upset the beehives, bite the pigs, and injure the peach-trees. No—I don't like young bears. There are many other animals that are less mischievous, and afford quite as much amusement. When I was in North Carolina, I once had a tame herring which used to follow me all over the house."

"Stop, Bahrens—don't go on too fast!" the judge observed, laughing. "A herring upon dry land! how did it manage to live?"

"Live!" exclaimed the old hunter, eagerly. "Live! an animal gets accustomed to anything; when young, it had been cast upon a sand-bank, and had never seen water again. It only wanted to have fresh sand given it every day. I have a little pig," exclaimed Bahrens, without waiting for any more objections. "A strange thing—and yet by no means uncommon—it is spotted like a fawn; and its little tail is so curiously twisted, that for the last three weeks it has not placed its hind legs upon the ground."

"Hurrah for Bahrens!" exclaimed Curtis.

"I very nearly caught a cub for you the day before yesterday, judge," said Cook, drawing his chair nearer to the table.

"Hallo, Eastley, bring in some pine-wood, or dry chips. The room is getting very dark, and I cannot see whether I have anything left in my tumbler or not."

"Where did that happen?" asked the judge.

"I was going to Lewisburg, and crossing the open plain, about eight or nine miles distant; it is a little kind of prairie; well—I was just riding across, when on the left, in the dry bed of a little river, I saw an old female bear, which was searching for worms with her cub—she had but one. My rifle was upon my shoulder, but not charged, for I was on my way to Lewisburg to have it repaired. I stopped my horse for a minute, rather puzzled what to do. I hardly thought it worth while to ride back in order to get another rifle, for the nearest house was not less than four miles distant, and who knows where the she-bear would have been by that time? I put my rifle against a tree, and resolved to have a bit of fun. I wanted to see for once what the old one would do when she caught sight of me. I rode cautiously through the bushes, which were not very thick, went straight on, and as the leaves were dry and did not rustle, and the two animals were so much occupied with their entomological researches, neither of them observed my approach until, when within ten paces, my pony caught scent of them, and neighed. Like lightning the old animal started up, and, forgetting everything else, made for a noble oak, caught hold of a branch with her fore-paw, and prepared to climb. I was close upon her heels, for when she stopped, my little horse, accustomed to such things, jumped over the trunk of a tree which was lying in the way, and almost touched the animal with his nose. You should have seen the old one run. Bless me! how she did scamper away when she heard my hunting-shout!"

"But what became of the cub?"

"Listen, and you shall hear. The thought suddenly struck me that, if the old animal left her young one in such a cowardly manner, I might perhaps be able to catch it, as it was a very young thing—it was about the middle of March. I immediately tried to put my project into execution. I turned my animal round, which did not seem at all anxious to give up the pursuit, and went after the cub. It had remained sitting behind the trunk, scratching the

ground. As soon as it saw me, it ran off with all its might. Of course it could not keep pace with my horse. I soon overtook it and cut off its retreat, and, uttering cries of terror, it sought refuge behind the trunk of a tree. I was just going to jump from the saddle, in order to seize my prize, when I heard a roar, and up came the old animal, with ears laid back and open mouth, its red tongue hanging out. I brought my little pony round in a twinkle, and, like a flash of lightning it disappeared in the bushes, with the old one at my heels. I should have stood but a poor chance, for I had no other weapon but a little scalping-knife with me; and so I was glad enough to escape, after a very sharp run. The old one went off with her cub at last."

"That is what always happens when one has no gun, or when it is not loaded," said Smith. "I, too, once—— But, hark! was not that the report of a gun?"

"Yes; I believe I heard a shot. It must have been Hecker. Nobody has been to that salt-pool for some time, and I should not wonder if he got more than one shot to-night."

"No more should I," continued Smith. "I met with a similar adventure in an orchard; you know the place, Cook, up there on the Arkansas."

"Hallo, there, in the house!" a voice before the door exclaimed suddenly, and all the dogs began to bark.

"Somebody calls," said the judge.

"Hallo, there, in the house!" repeated the voice outside, and this time in such loud tones as to drown even the barking and howling of the dogs.

"Hallo, out there! what is the matter?"

"Bring a candle, will you?"

"Who is there?"

"Harfield, from Spring-creek, and friends. Have you any pine-wood to spare, or a few pounds of wax to make large candles with?"

"Yes," exclaimed Eastley; "I have plenty of pine-wood, but no wax. It wants splitting, though. So your best plan will be to dismount and come in. Quiet, dogs!"

"Harfield! what the deuce brings you here in the middle of the night?" exclaimed the judge, who, followed by Cook,

had stepped in the doorway. "Whom have you brought with you here?"

"Friends from the Spring-creek," replied the new-comer.

Having exchanged some words with his companions, they dismounted and entered the house.

"Good evening, gentlemen. Do any of you know the fords of the Fourche-la-Fave, and would you be willing to act as our guide for a few hours?"

"What is the matter, then; are you upon somebody's track?"

"Some scoundrels, between Wednesday night and Thursday morning, stole six of my horses; luckily I soon missed them, even before morning, for the horses turned out on the other side of my farm-fence came to the house, which they never do unless frightened by strangers or wolves. Of course I could not follow the trail in the dark. However, I called together my neighbours before break of day, and with the early dawn we commenced the pursuit. The trail was large enough; but after a short run it divided, and the traces of three horses went to the right, those of the others to the left. Not without reason we imagined that this might be a trick to throw us off our guard. As we were five in number, we divided our band, in order to be quite sure, and we were led across the northern mountain-ridge of the Petite-Jeanne, and over the Magazin mountains, such a dreadful way, by such frightfully stony places, that I really do not understand how the horses could have stood it. This of course took us a good deal of time, for the scoundrels had ridden in a zigzag fashion, and in such a manner as to throw us off the trail at places where one could hardly see the print of a hoof. On the sources of the Panther-creek, where it flows down to the Petite-Jeanne, the two lots met again, and rode through the open wood towards the river, until they reached the road. This they did probably yesterday evening. Then they followed rather impudently the beaten track. At break of day, it appears, they had turned into the forest again and halted, to let themselves and the horses have a little rest. They also fed the animals. Heaven knows where they got the Indian corn; at any rate, they had stolen it. We were also obliged to rest a little, as we did not wish to distress our horses, more especially as the

fellows are pretty sure to fall into our hands. Since dark we have followed, though only at hap-hazard, the road which they entered again a few miles from this, and we thought it better to go surely though somewhat less rapidly, and to keep upon the trail during the night by the aid of torches. The horses will not be over-worked, and we do not lose any time. As they have, at any rate, crossed the river, we should like to take somebody with us who knows the fords, so that we may not be kept waiting."

"You do right to follow the tracks so closely, for there will be rain before to-morrow morning. The sun went down very suspiciously."

"I believe so too," said Harfield; "and this is an additional reason to hasten the pursuit. Oh, that's quite enough pine-wood, Eastley; that will do. If the fellows have only kept to the road during the night—which I do not doubt for a moment—we must catch them by break of day; or, at least, we shall not be far behind."

"Why should they follow the road?" asked Cook. "I do not believe it possible they will lead the horses over to the Hot Springs. Their only chance of escape, if not pursued immediately, is to reach the Arkansas river; and, besides, they always allow for an immediate chase; at least, they must take the likelihood of such a thing into account."

"That's true," observed Harfield. "We shall see, when we come to the other bank of the Fourche-la-Fave. If they mean to make for the Arkansas, they must go through the wood, in order to reach the lower road. In that case, indeed, we cannot do anything except wait until the morning. If they have kept to the road on the other bank, then we may be sure that they are making for the Hot Springs, and we can follow the high road quite comfortably."

"If we only knew where to find the Indian," said the judge; "he is a good fellow on a trail, and would be of essential advantage; but Heaven knows what has become of him."

"Perhaps that was the man we found up there at the salt-pool; he spoke broken English. It was getting dusk when we passed him, and I could not see his face."

"No, that is a German. But did the tracks go past there?"

"Yes—within about four hundred paces. They cannot be far off. He told us that he had seen the men just as he arrived, and before he had lighted his fire, but that he was not able to make them out, although the figure of one of them seemed familiar to him. Only think, there were only two of them in charge of these six horses. They must understand their trade well."

"How did you find the German?"

"In passing down the road we saw the flame of pine-wood, and rode up to question whomsoever we might find there. The hunter himself in such cases keeps, as you know, in the dark; and as our presence did not seem to be peculiarly agreeable to him, seeing that we could not but keep the game away from the salt-pool, we did not stay long."

"Who can the rascals be?" said the judge, thoughtfully. "I should not wonder if that scoundrel Cotton had his hand in the game; he was seen in this neighbourhood a short time ago, and the constables received orders to take him; but he must have got the scent, for he was off all of a sudden; at least, he has not been seen since."

"He wont escape the House of Correction," cried Smith.

"House of Correction!" retorted Harfield, angrily; "do you think we should make any difficulty about giving him his due, if we were to catch him with the horses? Do you see this?" With these words he produced a thin rope of twisted leather, which he showed to the judge. "As sure as I am called Harfield, the rascal shall hang to the very tree under which we catch him. He shall have as much time for praying as I shall want for making a noose—not a second more. We must show these scoundrels that we are in earnest, or they will skin us alive."

"But the laws," said the judge, shaking his head.

"The laws will do for the places for which they are made, and may be applied with propriety in towns. Here, in the forest, the matter is very different. The wish to subject us to them, is just the same as if we backwoodsmen should sit down and make laws for the people of the good city of New York. They could not make anything of such laws, and we should be sure, on the other hand, to forget about seven-eighths of what they needed as much as their daily bread. No, let each country make its own laws, and then they will,

most probably, be found available. So long as we are obliged to protect ourselves, so long we will be our own law-givers; and if I am to be protected by others,—well, then I shall go more to the west. Who will be my guide now?"

Cook, Curtis, and several others, were ready at once; and led by Curtis, who, as an old settler, knew every inch of that ground, they soon reached the road which crossed the Fourche-la-Fave from north to south. They followed it, and found the prints of hoofs in the smooth ground; Harfield asserted he could tell them among thousands as those of his horses.

The sky in the meanwhile had grown black, and a drizzling and penetrating rain began to fall. But though it soaked through the men's clothes, yet it did not wash out the traces of the horses' hoofs.

CHAPTER XI.

ASSOWAUM THE "FEATHERED ARROW," AND HIS SQUAW—HE LEAVES HER IN THE HUT—WESTON AND COTTON WAITING FOR THEIR COMRADE.

DURING the afternoon on which the election we described in the last chapter took place, Assowaum, with his blanket upon his back, his rifle on his shoulder, and followed by his squaw, strode silently through the forest, along the bank of the river. Alapaha, according to Indian fashion, carried the few kitchen things which these children of the wilderness require, as well as a woollen blanket and two dried deerskins. Silently she trod in the footprints of her husband and chief, who gazed attentively at both banks of the little stream, as if looking for some object which he could not find.

When he thought that he had ascended high enough, he returned, and renewed his examination, but with no better success than at first.

"Is not this the tree at the root of which the canoe was made fast?" he at last inquired of his wife, halting, and pointing to an old storm-beaten oak, the snow-white branches of which seemed to stretch upwards like the spectral arms

of a giant towards the dark masses of clouds which were lowering behind them.

"Assowaum can see the place to which it was tied," said Alapaha, stooping down over the steep bank of the river, and pointing at one of the protruding roots of the tree, from which some strips of bark hung in a fantastical manner.

"The canoe is gone," replied Assowaum, "and we must swim across if we mean to squat on the other side of the river."

Alapaha, without saying another word, put down her packages, rolled, by the aid of her husband, two broken branches into the river, in order to use them as a raft for transporting the few things they had with them to the other side of the river, and they both soon after ascended the steep bank on the opposite side.

"Which way is Alapaha going now?" the Indian next inquired, standing still, and regarding with a quiet look the beautiful young woman.

"Half a mile up the river we shall cross a road, which leads straight to Mr. Barill's house, and there Mr. Rowson has promised to hold a prayer-meeting to-morrow. Will not Assowaum for once listen to the words of the white man? He speaks well; his speech is like honey, and his heart is pure as an autumnal sky."

"Alapaha, it would be better if you too—stop; what is this?"

A slight rustling was heard in the bushes, and soon after a proud stag stepped forth from the thicket, raised its beautiful head, and looked quietly and securely around, as if unconscious of any danger. Assowaum, at the first sound of the rustling leaves, had raised his rifle; he put it slowly to his shoulder, and at the same moment the stag, struck by the deadly bullet, leaped high in the air, and fell dead in the thicket.

"That is good," said the Indian, re-charging his rifle, "very good. Mr. Harper has got no more meat, and he is too ill to go hunting himself. Alapaha will carry some meat to his hut."

"And does not Assowaum know that I am on my way to hear the word of God?" whispered his wife, inclining her slender form, and repeating a prayer.

"There was a time," replied Assowaum, looking towards the ground in a gloomy mood, "there was a time when Alapaha listened to the voice of the Feathered Arrow, and in so doing forgot the rustling of the tops of the trees, and the singing of the birds. There was a time when she turned her back on the God of the white man, and raised her hands to the Manitou of the red man. There was a time when she plaited for her husband the sacred wampum, and with mysterious signs brought him good luck in the chase. That time is passed. Alapaha is dead, and a Christian woman has taken her place—Maria. She still wears the same mocassins in which she left her people and followed her present husband into exile; she still wears the same shawl round her temples which Assowaum once tore from the shoulders of that savage chief of the Sioux Indians, that he might adorn with it the forehead of his squaw at home; she still wears the same string of the rattles of sacred serpents, and their sounds ought to remind her of the home and the land of her fathers. But no, her ear is closed—it does not hear; but still more closed is her heart—it does not feel."

"Assowaum," the beautiful woman remonstrated, in low and entreating tones,—"Assowaum, do not be angry with me. Remember our life is short, and before me I see spread out the most beautiful and the brightest future. Oh, you do not know how splendid, how charming the heaven of the white man is. Will you rob me of that—take from me the belief in all that is dear and sacred in this life, besides the duties which I owe to you?"

"No," answered Assowaum; "Alapaha may go and serve the God of the white man. It is good for you to do so."

"And will you never listen to the words of the holy man from whose lips Manitou himself speaks?"

Assowaum stretched forth his right hand, and was about to make some reply; but suddenly changing his mind, he put his rifle to his shoulder, saying—

"Alapaha must not only pray, but eat too. Not far from this, on the bank of the river, stands a small uninhabited hut; we will carry the game there, and Alapaha can cure it this evening. The hut will afford her protection against storm and wind to-night, and to-morrow morning she will

not be far from the settlement of the whites, where the pale man will speak of the God of his nation."

"And Assowaum?"

"Has promised the little man to search for his nephew, and he will keep his word. The white men speak ill of their brother, because they do not hear the sound of his steps among them. He is far away; he will come back, and the guilty parties will be silent and look up to him."

"But he is guilty——"

"What serpent has poured this poison into Alapaha's ear? She has listened to the words of the Madimito,* and throws dust on the head of him who has done good to her."

"Mr. Rowson says that the nephew of the little man has killed and robbed a brother."

"The pale man does not speak the truth," exclaimed the Indian, drawing up his tall figure, while the blood rushed to his temples, and his eyes sparkled. "The pale man does not speak the truth," he repeated, "and he knows it."

"Assowaum is angry with the Christian, because he has turned Alapaha away from the belief of her fathers. Assowaum is brave and generous; he will not insult a man because his belief differs from his."

"We will carry the meat into the hut," said the Indian, changing the topic of conversation; "it is getting late. Assowaum has many miles to walk before it gets dark."

The Indian began cutting up the deer; he separated the neck and head from the body, leaving them to wolves and bustards, and placing the carcass on a pole, he took hold of one end, while Alapaha placed the other upon her shoulder; and in this manner they proceeded silently, and in a short time reached their destination.

It was a roughly-built log-hut, erected by a former settler, and left after a short occupation, the land around being too low, and consequently too much exposed to the inundations of the river. The roof and the walls were still in pretty good condition, but in all other respects the hut did not offer the least comfort, for even the chimney had fallen in, and there was no floor. The want of a chimney, however, was no obstacle to lighting a fire in the interior, for there were nume-

* A conjuror; meaning here, the Methodist.

rous chinks in the walls, and draughts to carry off the smoke. The wind howled and whistled strangely through these apertures, and played with the loose pieces of bark hanging on the roughly-hewn boards.

When Assowaum and his wife reached this place, they carried the meat into the interior of the hut. The door had fallen from its wooden hinges, and lay before the porch, obstructing the entrance. Assowaum looked round the deserted building for a moment, and said—"The hut is good, and will afford shelter to Alapaha. When she comes back from her devotions, she will carry the meat into the hut of the little man. Assowaum will be with her before the whip-poor-will has sung his third note."

Having said these words, he turned round and strode silently into the forest, with his head hanging down. Alapaha in the meanwhile did as her husband had desired. With a small handsome tomahawk which she wore at her side, she cut some thin branches, in order to make a frame on which to dry the meat; brought wood to keep up a warm fire for the night; then she cut the meat into strips, placed it on reeds she had got for this purpose, and hung it over the fire she had kindled with a few dry leaves.

In the meantime the sky had become more and more clouded, a fine drizzling rain began to fall, and the wind roared loudly through the tops of the trees which stood near the hut. Alapaha cowered down beside the crackling flame, humming a hymn which she had learned from her white friends, and waited for the setting-in of the night before preparing her couch. At the same time she kept her eye upon the game, in order that it might be ready next morning to be tied up and preserved.

The country was not, however, quite so solitary and deserted as Alapaha might at first have thought. While she was so eagerly engaged at her work, a young man stepped forth from the thicket about half a mile higher up the road, near the river, taking care not to follow the smooth and beaten track. He looked anxiously at the opposite bank, as if he expected to see some one approach from that direction. The air was by no means very warm, and the man rubbed his hands, then swung his arms about, and several times paced up and down the ground strewn

with leaves; stopping every now and then, and looking anxiously at the spot he had just quitted, in order to ascertain whether his tracks might not be too distinct and easily perceived.

A second man soon joined him. The new-comer wore a blanket; and his old and well-worn hat was pulled over his brows. He carried his rifle under his arm, in order to protect the lock as much as possible against the falling dew. He stepped up close to the anxious watcher, and asked him, with a laugh—"Well, Weston, you are getting tired here, I dare say? You are cold; why didn't you bring your blanket with you? I told you to do so before. Have you heard anything yet?"

"Not the least sound in the world," replied the other, angrily; "I do not believe that they will be here to-night. It will be a bad joke if I am compelled to pass the whole night here without a blanket or a fire; I shall be a corpse by to-morrow morning."

"That would be a loss of at least twenty dollars to the sheriff," said Cotton, laughing, for that was the young man's worthy comrade; "but I am not inclined to think that we shall have to wait long. Rowson is familiar with every nook and corner in that place, and so is Johnson. They cannot expect to meet with many difficulties. Besides, you yourself say that Rowson has announced a prayer-meeting for to-morrow morning in the settlement over there; and this alone will be a sufficient consideration to induce him to do everything in his power in order to keep his appointment, and not to create any suspicion. I cannot bear that hypocritical scoundrel, but he is an excellent fellow to deal with in business; nobody can deny that. One can see at a glance that he comes from the Yankee States."

"The affair of Heathcott's murder is just now making a great stir among the people. Brown, after all, seems to have been his murderer. Your name has also been mentioned."

"Mine! Why the deuce do they connect me with such a deed? I never saw that young fellow; and am I to be charged with every crime that is committed in this neighbourhood?"

"It must be a matter of perfect indifference to you," said

Weston, laughing; "however, it is not the murder that they charge you with, but the robbery."

"What robbery?"

"The dead man is said to have carried in his pocket the price of three good horses, and that would be from four to five hundred dollars. They are gone."

"The deuce! Then the affair would have been worth doing. One might have killed two birds with one stone—a Regulator, and a bag of dollars. Brown isn't a blockhead. However, I tell you, Weston, that Brown never had anything to do with us. What grudge could he bear the Regulator?"

"There are other matters, I believe. The women up there at the settlement would have it that Heathcott and Brown were both suitors to the same girl, and hence their cause of quarrel. That is of little importance. The principal point is, we have got rid of Heathcott; how, and in what manner, can matter but little."

"Well, listen; Harfield does not understand a joke either, and if he were to come upon our track, things would look serious enough. I do not see how we can manage to create confusion with the tracks so as not to be caught by those wretches. This much is certain—if I were pursuing you, you might find escape rather a difficult matter."

"You are mistaken," answered Weston, with a cunning grin; "the thing has been planned with a wonderful deal of cleverness. Rowson has managed the affair. Before they reach the river, they intend to ride on the high road again."

"On the high road?" repeated Cotton, astonished.

"Yes, on the free, open high road, so that their tracks may be quite distinct. Then they will go into the river, and then—not out of it again."

"Where then? They cannot remain in the river, forsooth! Where will they come out?"

"Lower down, out of reach of pursuit; and then into the wide, wide world."

"The animals wont stand so much swimming."

"That's why I have hidden Hoswell's canoe up there. Don't you see it, just there, under the reeds? I have moored another close at hand. This last one comes from the mouth of the brook, close to Stewart's. They will most probably

conclude that the waters carried it away into the Arkansas. With these two canoes we can get the horses down the stream splendidly as far as we wish, in fact, until we reach the place which has been pointed out by Rowson. From that spot you must take the lead, for I do not know the way to the 'Island,' as you call it. Johnson, in the meanwhile, is to put the pursuers upon the wrong track; and if he succeeds in doing that, we shall be out of all danger, especially if it turns out wet to-morrow, as I hope it will. Then we shall hurry the animals through the forest, and if we once reach the swamps of the Mississippi, good-bye to pursuit. Johnson has assured me that we shall find plenty of assistance in that quarter, and people about here know that well enough, and therefore wont take the trouble to follow us very far."

"That's all very well, and pleasant to hear. Yet the folks at the Spring river will not be such asses as to suppose that we have flown through the air with the horses, just as I saw represented the other day in a picture at the German's hut."

"The best of it is, that down there in the reed-land—that is to say, not in the reed-land, but below it, in the bed of the river—on that stone-flat stands your horse."

"Mine?"

"Your horse and Johnson's; two white ones. As soon as we have commenced our journey with fresh horses, these will be taken up the river, where the bed is quite shallow. Johnson will gallop away nimbly on the high road, as if he was making for the Hot Springs. Should our pursuers only arrive to-morrow, or the day after, and should rain have fallen in the meanwhile, this precaution will indeed have been unnecessary. Should they, as I fear they will, follow more closely upon our track, they will of course look for the prints of the horses' feet, which will lead into the river on this side of the ford, and out of it on the other; and they will follow these without hesitation, and, what is more important, without even dismounting, or any very close examination. Should they catch Johnson, of course he will not have *their* horses, nor will he know anything about them; and they will discover, when it is too late, that they have been running after the wrong animals. Should they fail to overtake him, why, so much the better. Then he can go

by a roundabout way to the Island, announce the approach of the horses that are to follow, and sell ours."

"What, my horse?"

"Don't be a fool, Cotton," said Weston, laughing. "At any rate, you will get the purchase-money."

"Yes; but how much? Not half its value."

"And then," continued Weston, not heeding the interruption, "under present circumstances, you must not in any case be seen again about here, and I should advise you to leave the country in a very short time."

"But what has that to do with my horse?"

"I certainly quite misunderstand your character, if I could imagine that you would go away from the Fourche-la-Fave your *own* horse," said Weston, laughing.

"You are right, Weston; that was a good observation of yours," said Cotton, with much vanity; "and do you know——"

"Don't shout so; for aught you know, somebody might be about here in the neighbourhood. I heard shots this afternoon."

"Do you know that I have already hit upon a horse that pleases me immensely?"

"Indeed! and who has the honour of possessing the fortunate animal?"

"Roberts; it is his stallion I mean—a splendid creature!"

"Really, Cotton, you are not quite a fool. On *his* back you may, indeed, defy pursuit. But such a capture will make a tremendous sensation."

"The plan is good," Cotton replied, musing. "As far as business goes, Rowson is an excellent hand; and the manner in which he bamboozles all the females in the neighbourhood is really first-rate. How they would open their eyes, if they could see him galloping through the forest to-night, with two stolen horses!"

"Mrs. Roberts thinks him a saint. Well, it's all the same to me, though it is a pity that the poor young girl should be compelled to marry him. Harkee, Cotton, I must ask you a question. I often hear you and the others talking about the Island. I am myself very anxious to know more about the place. Tell me, what do you mean by the Island? What island is it, and where is it situated?"

"I must not give you any information," replied Cotton, mysteriously. "That is a secret with which too many cannot be trusted; and I should not like to be the owner of the tongue which made any revelation. This only may I confide to you, that it is situated upon the Mississippi, and that its inhabitants are well disposed towards us. I have never been there myself."

"Upon the Mississippi! Bah! There are many islands on the Mississippi. Friendly disposed towards us! Why, half Arkansas is so, and five-sixths of Texas. Come, tell me other particulars about the place. What is its number? for you must be aware that all the islands in the Mississippi are known by certain numbers."

"Of course, I know that," returned his companion, with a sneer; "but I must not tell you anything further. You will know the whole story soon enough. In a few days we shall be there; until then be patient, and restrain your curiosity. But, stop—hark! what was that?"

"Silence!" cried Weston; "that was the cry of the whip-poor-will. Rowson said he would give us that signal. Should that be he—I will answer, at any rate, for it cannot be dangerous. All is quiet around."

Having said this, Weston put his finger to his mouth, and imitated the shrill sound of the little bird.

A reply was heard in the tones of Johnson's voice; and, all at once, the two men appeared at a sharp trot. They soon reached the bank, waving their hats to their comrades as a signal of success.

CHAPTER XII.

CUNNING OF THE HORSE-STEALERS—THE SURPRISE—ALAPAHA AND ROWSON.

"HURRAH!" exclaimed Weston, catching sight of the splendid horses which at this moment approached from the opposite bank of the river. They stopped at the brink of the water. Again, forgetful of all former caution, he shouted "Hurrah! they are what I call horses!"

"Are you mad, both of you?" exclaimed Rowson, with anger. "Are you really bent on attracting the attention of any one who may by chance be passing? Be silent, and reserve your rejoicings until you have performed your share of the undertaking. Where are your horses?"

"At the appointed place, down there," said Weston.

"Well, be quick and fetch them. Take care that you leave no prints upon the bank. You will have to keep in the deep water."

"Ay, ay, I know; Weston is not quite so stupid."

The young fellow hastened down to the place where he had left his horses, and returned in a very short time, keeping very cautiously to the middle of the stream, which could not in this place have been more than three feet deep.

"Where are the boats now?" asked Rowson. "It will not matter if *these* horses do tread the ground, for if the owners really should follow us, they will think we were in doubt about taking the horses across. If we leave the other animals on the opposite bank, and let them make many marks, the pursuers will examine them more closely, and endeavour to divine why we remained there so long; and in that case they might find out that the marks were not those of their own horses; and this is so much the more likely, since Cotton's horse has such very large hoofs."

Weston disappeared with Cotton in the reedland, and after a short interval they re-appeared with their canoes.

"Stop!" said Johnson. "No further; they must not see the marks of the boats upon the bank, so come to the middle. Now bring the horses here. You had better go in, Rowson. Two in the large, and one in the small canoe. Stop a moment; let me change horses; ah! now a weight is off my mind, for I am seated once more on the back of my own horse."

"Convince us that you can ride, Johnson," said Rowson, while the other got ready to climb up the bank. "Let the horses go as fast as possible, they have had a good rest. Give them spur and whip, and consider that every mile we put between us and our pursuers is worth gold."

"Don't be afraid," answered Johnson, laughing; "they must ride fast indeed, if they mean to catch me; and if they do catch me, I shall laugh at them. I have already made pre-

parations, and told several of my acquaintances that I meant to take my horses, with several others, into the southern part of the State, thus hoping to get a better price for them."

"Away, then," replied Rowson; "who knows how soon they may come clattering after us, and we should not be found in a very enviable situation."

"But how about provisions?" asked Cotton.

"I do not want any," shouted Johnson, who had now reached the upper ridge of the bank. "The horses must rest occasionally, of course, and that will give us an opportunity of calling at some house."

"At any rate, not to-night, in case our pursuers should get the right scent, and, from the description of the horses, learn the direction they had taken."

"Don't be afraid, we sha'n't halt until to-morrow at noon, and the horses must stand it as they best can."

"A fortunate issue, then," cried Johnson; and immediately after, uttering his hunting cry, he put spurs to his horse, and disappeared in the forest.

"So far, so good," said Rowson; "now, Cotton, how are we to manage with these horses here? First of all, we had better quit this place, and descend the river about half a mile. Here, on the road, we are exposed not only to the observation of any chance traveller, but those accursed Regulators, who might come down upon us unexpectedly. Therefore don't be particular just now about tying the horses to the canoes. We can lead them down a little way without doing that. At the first sand-bank we reach we can put everything in order, and before dark we shall have finished all our arrangements."

These remarks were too sensible, and the course advised too sagacious, to admit of any reply. Preparations were quickly made, and in a few minutes the two boats, to each of which three horses were fastened, glided round the bend in the river, which very effectually concealed them from passers-by on the road.

"Now I begin to feel a little more comfortable," whispered Rowson. "It gets darker and darker; and if our pursuers should follow us to-night, they will doubtless run into the trap we have laid for them. Hurrah! it gladdens my heart

to think of those fellows galloping along the tracks with revengeful looks—more eager, every minute, to catch the depredators. With their last desperate efforts, putting spurs to the animals' sides, they will come up with them, and then the baffled expression of their faces, on perceiving their mistake. Johnson's innocent sheepish countenance, as he declares he feels sorry at being the innocent cause, perhaps, of saving the criminals from their just punishment. Ah, what a glorious idea!"

"Here is the sand-bank," said Weston, pointing with his hand to the left bank; "the animals are on the ground here, and it would be advisable to make them all right, and also to fasten them properly to the boats; for just below, directly we have turned this bend in the river, the stream gets deep, and the horses will have to swim for some distance. I examined the locality this morning as I came up."

"If I am not mistaken," Cotton observed, looking towards the bank, "there must be a small deserted hut somewhere about here. Three years ago we camped in it, when I went with Johnson to the Nation.* The brushwood has grown up so thick one can hardly recognise the spot. Yes, this is the place," he exclaimed, as the boats touched the bank, "I know it by the fallen plane-tree; it fell the very night we camped here, and had it gone in another direction we should have been done for."

"Arkansas would not have put on mourning on that account."

"No, hardly; and many a—— but we may as well keep quiet while rounding that point. What are you about?"

"We must fasten the smaller boat to the larger one," said Rowson; "then we can put two horses on each side and two behind us. We shall not be obliged to row very hard, for the stream flows pretty strong. If necessary, one can attend to that, especially the steering; the others must look after the horses, and take care that they do not go foul of anything. At twelve we must be at the 'Devil's-crook.' There I shall leave you two to your fate. Do not spare the horses, and avoid the broad high road. Should your pursuers hit upon the real tracks to-morrow—which is hardly

* Under the name "Nation," the inhabitants of Arkansas mean the Cherokee Indians.

to be expected,—in fact, is only possible by the greatest chance,—you will have twelve hours' start, and good horses under you. Cotton, you know the way?"

"I should think I do," the other replied; "I have travelled it often enough, and with five fellows at my heels. If we once reach the Mississippi swamp—where I know every inch of the road—we shall be safe. There is one spot in particular, at which I will fell a tree and put it across the road; it would take pursuers almost a day to follow me on horseback. Hitherto I have kept that place in my eye as a safe retreat in case of great danger."

"But where will you get an axe?"

"Last month I hid an axe in a hollow tree close by. In case of necessity I shall not want for tools."

"That will do, then," said Rowson, who had just finished arranging the boats. Now, Cotton, I have to say a word to you about your manner of proceeding, and then to work. Weston knows the place where you will first land; it is a part where stones abound, and has this advantage, that our tracks cannot be seen from the water. About a hundred paces down the river, where a pine has fallen across—at least, he gave me his word that he would do it—Atkins will have concealed a supply of bread and other provisions."

"Why don't you go with us to that place?" asked Weston.

"My tracks might be traced," replied Rowson; "and this is not possible at the 'Devil's-crook.' If, therefore, I make a little detour across the mountains, I can return into the settlement from quite an opposite direction. I do not trust that cursed Indian; and if they once got the idea of sending him upon our trail, the results might be disagreeable; therefore I am as cautious as possible. But, Cotton, have you not brought something with you to eat? I am terribly hungry. As we came along I almost fancied that I got scent of some roasted stag-flesh; I wish I had a piece here. It's a great pity that you did not bring any provisions with you. You might have had sense enough to think of this!"

"In the reedland where the horses stood I left my pocket-handkerchief with some maize-bread and stag's-meat," said Weston; "but I really forgot it, and it will now, I fear, be too late to fetch it."

"The devil! you should have thought of that earlier. Can nobody find it?"

"No; I hid it carefully; but had we not better be off?"

"Wait till Cotton has done that bridle," said Rowson; "if it should break on the road it would give us more bother, and perhaps we should not even be able to mend it in the dark."

"Tell us how you managed to get off with the horses, Rowson," said Cotton, busily occupied endeavouring to repair the bridle; "tell us now, for on the way we shall not have much time for conversation, and then, after all, I shall perhaps lose the whole story."

"It can be told in a very few words," replied Rowson, smiling, taking a large piece of tobacco and putting it in his mouth. "Happily we met with no acquaintances on the road, and reached the place at the corner of the fence close where the Spring-creek flows about dusk. We crept round the mill, and when the owls began to fly we stood on the fence in which the mares were. I did not feel comfortable about the matter, for, according to our calculation, the horses ought to have been there by that time. It could not however be helped, and so Johnson and I climbed into two trees, to be secure from surprise in the first place, and to be able to observe anybody or anything approaching. It was lucky that we did so, for we had hardly got up into the trees when Harfield himself——did you say anything, Cotton?"

"No—why?"

"I thought I heard a sound. Harfield himself went past, returning from a hunting excursion with a pack of hounds. Had we been upon the ground, the dogs would have been certain to scent us out, and then, good-bye to poor Johnson, for Harfield owes him a grudge. Moreover, the bridles we carried would, in any case, have betrayed us. As it was, the hounds only sniffed about among the trees and raised their noses—at which we grew rather anxious—and then scampered after their master, who had in the meantime got some distance ahead. We had both of us been in the most painful suspense; but there was an end to our anxiety, for immediately afterwards the horses came up. As it was not then quite dark, we were able to select those which pleased

us most. We put our bridles upon them, jumped up on their backs, and away we went like a hurricane through the forest. Several times I thought we must break our necks and legs. In order to throw any pursuers off the track, we rode for some time in zigzag fashion on the stony road, went in different directions, and only when we believed ourselves perfectly secure did we ride with less caution and also quicker."

"Did not the horses give you any trouble at first?"

"Oh, yes, they reared very much; and when we had got hold of the last ones, the others tore away. They neighed, and galloped round the fence, most likely into the wood again. The brown horse carried me round and round five or six times before I could get him to stand still."

"Wont Harfield be in a rage!" Cotton observed; "six horses at a time have not been stolen from a farmer for the last generation."

"And the pious Rowson taking the lead!" said Weston, in great glee.

"A word, Rowson," Cotton continued, now looking over his bridle at the preacher, who was standing in a very confident attitude. "What shall you preach about to-morrow? It is a pity that I cannot hear your discourse; it would be worth the trouble!"

"Hang it!" exclaimed Rowson, angrily, "I should really like to get off that nonsense to-morrow; I shall be inattentive, and anxious to know what may have become——"

"Of the horses?"

"Well, yes, of course, the horses; and I shall have to stand there and offer up prayers, and sing their silly old hymns."

"The fat widow will fall into a swoon," added Weston, with great gusto.

"And the pious talk with that pretty Indian woman!" said Cotton, interrupting him. "Harkee, Rowson, you have not a bad taste, either."

"Come," exclaimed Rowson, "make haste, and let us get away. I begin to feel cold, and the horses are cold too. Has nobody a drop of whisky? Johnson, that scoundrel, has taken my bottle away in his pocket, and did not say a

word about returning the same. Oh, the devil! can't you leave a drop in that flask? You suck at it as if you wished to pump the air out."

Cotton handed the bottle to him, and Rowson having taken a hearty draught, put the cork in again, and returned it to its owner.

"That's refreshing, is it not?" said Cotton, wiping his lips. "Yes, and heating too; that gives warmth."

"It does one good this evening," said Rowson, shivering; "this drizzling rain makes one feel cold."

"Now we can go on again," exclaimed Cotton, putting the bridle, which he had at last mended, on his horse. "Quick, now; it gets darker and darker; and there—— a plague on it!" he added, in a whisper. "What is that? There is a light glittering through the bushes."

"Where?" exclaimed Rowson, in alarm.

"Up there—it must be in the hut."

"I see something moving in the bush!" cried Weston, whose piercing eye caught sight of the outlines of a figure, which appeared to be hiding behind the dark shrubs which bordered the river.

"The devil!" cried Cotton; "there is treason!" and, like an arrow from the bow, he bounded, followed by Rowson, up the bank, and the next moment stood before the solitary being who had observed all their motions, and had heard every word they had spoken.

"Alapaha!" cried Rowson, in dismay.

"The red-skinned woman!" ejaculated Cotton, almost as much astonished as frightened.

"You are alone?" Rowson said quickly to the Indian woman. "You are alone? Where is Assowaum?"

The poor woman had no power to answer. She stood a few moments gazing at the unmasked hypocrite with such a ghastly, earnest, yea, dreadful look, that he cast down his eyes—he could not bear that glance. It was only a moment the proud daughter of the woods stood thus before the man who had robbed her of her belief in her own God, and the love of her husband. The reflection of her unutterable, fearful misery came over her—how she had renounced the Great Spirit, whom her forefathers had venerated in the waving of the mighty forest, in the rippling of the still brook; how

she had listened to the words of a man whom she had taken to be a saint, and who now—her heart shuddered at him as he stood before her—appeared in his true colours, as a thief and a robber.

She buried her face in her hands, and large clear tears poured down upon her clenched fingers.

"The horses are growing restless," said Cotton, ill-humouredly; "what are we to do with this woman?"

"Leave her to me," whispered Rowson, standing before her, with a satanical expression upon his countenance.

"Leave her to you! that's just what you want," the other replied, with a sneer. "You are no fool—but is this the time for such nonsense?"

"Be off with the horses!" Rowson cried, in a subdued voice. "The river makes a bend here of about three miles. There is, however, a short cut straight across. Go and help Weston with the horses—he can do nothing with them alone."

"And what is to be done about the woman?"

"Don't trouble yourself on that score," whispered Rowson. "I run the most risk in case she should reveal what she has seen; therefore——"

"At any rate, follow us as soon as you can," cried Cotton. "You are responsible for the consequences, should we be late."

He ran down the bank, and a few seconds afterwards the boats glided from the shore, with the horses, into the dark gloom that lay upon the waters.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PREACHER UNMASKED BY THE INDIAN—THE FLIGHT.

"WHERE is Assowaum?" asked the preacher, in a low but firm tone of voice, as he approached the young Indian woman.

She seemed either to have anticipated his question, or not to have heard it, for nothing broke the stillness of the night but her sobs, and the heavy breathing of the preacher.

"Where is Assowaum?" the preacher repeated, after a painful silence, taking with his right hand the arm of the weeping woman. Alapaha shrunk at the touch as if stung by a serpent, freed herself from his grasp, and exclaimed, with a shudder—

"Get off! your breath is poison—your touch is death—your tongue is deceitful—and your breast harbours Satan! Away! the grass and the flowers must wither wherever you place your foot—the birds must cease their songs when you approach them! Your God is a God of lies, for otherwise he would long since have sent his lightning to consume you! Abomination—away!"

"Where is Assowaum?" asked the preacher, in a hoarse voice, without heeding her imprecations.

"Oh that he were here to punish you!" she said, passionately, stretching herself to her full height; "oh that he were here to wipe away the shame which you have heaped upon his poor wife's head! Woe to you when he does find you—for he shall meet you. His war-cry shall sound in your ears. Oh! you have not yet seen him in his martial glory," she continued, proudly, when she noticed the sneer on the American's lips; "you have not yet seen him wielding his lightning tomahawk, with his war-cry on his lips, and the death of his enemy in his eye. You have not yet beheld him at the war-dance, red with the blood of his victims, and with the scalps of the conquered in his belt; but he will come—he will return."

"When, woman, when?" asked the preacher, quickly, putting his hand suddenly to his side.

"When!" ejaculated the Indian woman, with a triumphant laugh; "when! Sooner than you desire. Before the sun has risen twice in the east he will be here, and woe to you if you happen to cross his path."

"Where is he now?"

"Ah! how you tremble, wretched coward, at the mere mention of his return! I am but a woman, but I feel proud when looking down upon you."

"Where is he now?" the white man inquired once more, not quite free from alarm; for he could not understand why the Indian woman had left her wigwam and come to encamp in the forest without her husband's protection.

"Where is he now!" Alapaha repeated, with a sneer. "He will not return alone; the strong arm that slew the man who dared to offer violence to me will be with him. Tremble! for your God wont protect you."

"Hah!" exclaimed Rowson, as a demoniacal joy lighted up his features. "Then he is gone to fetch his associate—I thought as much; you are mine, and none shall take you from me."

"Stand back!" shrieked the Indian woman, as Rowson was about to seize her, "stand back; your eyes glow; stand back!"

"You are mine!" exclaimed Rowson, with a wild laugh, "you are mine; and I defy the red-skinned scoundrel—let him come; but nothing shall tear you from me. It will be my care that you do not betray us."

"May the Manitou of our nation, to which I belong from this moment, give me strength," exclaimed Alapaha, tearing herself from the embrace of the infuriated preacher, and seizing the tomahawk she carried at her side—"Die, you accursed wretch! die by a woman's hand, and may buzzards and wolves dispute over your carcase—die!"

With these words, she sprang upon the preacher, who recoiled in terror. The next moment would have sealed his doom, if the door, which had fallen from its hinges, had not caught her foot; she stumbled, fell, and the next moment was in the hands of her foe.

"If Rowson does not soon put a stop to that bawling," said Cotton, ill-humouredly, "he will certainly bring some one at our or his heels. I heard shooting about here this afternoon, and it is not by any means improbable that hunters are somewhere in the wood."

"I wish he would come," remarked Weston, in no better mood; "going with the stream is dreadful slow work; and one really cannot look after three horses, and keep on rowing. The animals are getting restless, the water is cold, and I begin to be uncomfortable enough."

The men listened for a moment, and once more the shrill cry of the Indian woman broke the silence of the night. The owl in the dark pines on the bank of the river answered shrilly, and flew towards the spot whence the noise proceeded.

"A plague on the fool!" cried Cotton, in anger; "I

almost wish she could escape, and—that is to say, if we were only some fifty miles off. Should the Red-skin get away just now, and give the alarm, it would be death to us. I believe we should have an army at our backs by to-morrow."

"He will not kill her?" said Weston, with a shudder, as he was listening in the direction whence the sounds had come. "There is a dead quiet just now; it makes me shudder, Cotton. I hope he will not shed blood."

"Fool!" murmured Cotton. "Will you put your own neck into the halter, eh? do you wish to be lifted off the ground by the Regulators, and strung up to the branch of an oak-tree? Rowson will do whatever is necessary. If it can be done without blood, so much the better—I am no friend of unnecessary severity; but if not, then——"

"Oh, no blood—no blood!" exclaimed Weston, with a shudder; "I have joined with you to take the horses—there is no sin in that—but blood—it is awful to think of it! I do not wish to have blood upon my conscience; and she is but a woman, too."

"And, therefore, so much the more dangerous," said Cotton, laughing; "at least, in the matter of a secret. But don't be foolish, Rowson knows how to manage; he will be sure to do nothing that is not necessary. Look to that horse, it is on the ground, and wants to go ashore; bother it, already its footprints are in the mud—take care, Weston, we don't know who may be on our trail!"

"It is impossible to look after the lot," exclaimed Weston, angrily; "why does Rowson stay so long? the horses are impatient, and my hands are already numbed from holding them so long."

"There is the place where he said he would meet us," said Cotton; "at the root in the water just before you. I have often hunted in this part, and I know every bend in the river."

"There is somebody standing at the root, too," said Weston, in a low voice.

At the same moment the cry of the whip-poor-will was heard, and immediately afterwards Rowson, for it was he, jumped from the shore where he stood into the water, here but a few inches deep, and waded up to the boat.

"Here are provisions," he said, in a hoarse tone of voice, throwing some meat into the boat; "excellent game."

"Where is the Indian woman?" asked Weston, anxiously, looking steadfastly into Rowson's face.

"Safe," he answered, laconically, and turned away from the inquiring gaze of his comrade.

"Safe? You do not mean to say that you have injured her, I hope?"

"Nonsense! Mind your own business—what have you to do with mine? Give me the horses, and take the rudder a little; the water is getting deeper, and we shall proceed faster."

"How far are we from the landing-place?" asked Cotton.

"Three miles—rather more than less."

"How far shall you go with us?"

"About two more. We shall soon reach the range of hills at the foot of which I intend to get out, but——Weston, come here and take this bridle. Cotton, haven't you an old kerchief or something of that kind with you?"

"What do you want with it? Will my necktie do?"

"Give it to me; or perhaps you can bind it round my arm—here—just below my shoulder."

"You must take off your coat, or I cannot do it properly. This boat rocks so much, I really fear I shall lose my balance."

"Then I will wait a quarter of an hour, until we come to a shallower place. I can then walk by the boat in the water, and it will be done more easily."

"What is the matter with your shoulder?" asked Cotton, as his comrade took off his coat and rolled his shirt-sleeve up.

"I—that little witch managed, I don't know how, to get hold of the tomahawk I had taken from her, and—but it is of no consequence. There, where the stream glitters so much, the deep water ceases, and we can do it."

Silently the men floated down to the place which Rowson had pointed out. Rowson jumped overboard, feeling his way carefully with a short oar; and as he walked along slowly at the side of the boat, holding on with his right hand, Cotton bound up his wound, by no means a slight one.

"If the moon would only shine a little," Weston exclaimed,

after a while, "then we might make out the place where we are to land."

"You want the moon, do you?" said Cotton. "That is just the very last thing we require. I wish it would rain."

The boats were now floating past a range of steep hills, whose rocky sides overhung the river, while large cedars here and there showed their dark forms in the clefts. Their crest was crowned by high, waving pines and firs, and cedars and hickories formed the thick and almost impenetrable underwood.

"We are not very far from the point; it is just below. There I shall leave you; and, Cotton, you know where you have to land."

"Trust me for that; I shall not miss it, rely upon it. Should I do so, about a quarter of a mile lower down there is just such another place. But stop—what is that? I see a fire on shore; somebody is squatting there."

"Silence," whispered Rowson; "whoever it may be, he cannot, on account of the reeds, come close to the shore, and the shadows of the trees will conceal us from curious eyes."

The barking of a dog was now heard from the shore, and a voice endeavouring to quiet the animal. The reed-thicket was, as Rowson had justly observed, so thick and tangled, that it would have been impossible for any one to cross the river at this spot. Silently the men floated down the stream, which was now very deep.

"Curse the horses! how loud they breathe," whispered Cotton, after a while.

"It is time to take them on shore," Rowson replied. "However, there is the place where I must land, so keep a little nearer that I may jump out, and do your business well. Now stop."

With these words he leapt from the boat on a projecting stone, waved his hands to his companions, and disappeared in the dark.

It required a good boatman to prevent the craft from upsetting by the recoil. Cotton, however, understood what he was about, and the boat for a few seconds merely rocked, without having taken in a single drop of water.

Weston had not spoken a syllable since he heard the spasmodic cry of the Indian woman. It still sounded in his ears, and a strange unconquerable anguish took hold of him. He

started at the least noise, and his heart throbbed violently. Without exchanging another word they soon reached the place pointed out by Rowson, where huge rocks ran out almost into the middle of the river, stretching high up the bank, which was clothed in thick low brushwood. Here the adventurers paused, and allowed the restive horses to take once more to dry land.

"Well, you may stamp," said Cotton, "you will soon have work enough to do. Hold them for a minute, Weston; I must sink Hoswell's canoe, that it may not be found to excite suspicions. The other can float away—nobody knows it; and even should it be recognised, people will think that it has been carried away by the current." Having said this, he quickly divested himself of his garments that he might not be impeded in his swimming. "Nobody will get scent of this very quickly—at least, not soon enough to do us any harm. Now let's away; we have not a moment to spare."

"Are you sure you know the way?" asked Weston, anxiously. "In the night it is rather difficult to keep in the right direction in the forest."

"Don't be afraid," exclaimed Cotton; "we must keep up a little towards the ridge of the mountain, for there is less underwood, and we cannot miss our way. If we can only get out of this reed-thicket, which is hardly five hundred paces broad in this direction, then there will be no further difficulty. Come, get up, Weston—to horse. Let me see what sort of saddles you have brought with you from home."

"An old Spanish one for you, and none at all for myself. I shall take this buffalo-skin; have we far to go?"

"Bless me," said Cotton, laughing, "we shall not be there to-morrow, nor the day after; but that's all the same; when one embarks in such business as ours, one must not be very particular. Rowson's plan is capital, at all events, and I think we shall reach the Mississippi swamp in safety. I shall only be astonished if they let Johnson off scot-free."

"If I only knew whether Rowson had done any harm to the Indian woman," said Weston, with a sigh.

"Oh, plague upon your Indian woman! how does she interest you? It is beginning to rain again; but really I ought not to be angry on that account; it is just what we want, and can only aid our plans, especially Johnson's, for

they will not be able to make out where he has come with the horses. Let us go across there, Weston; this is the mouth of one of the little brooks, and is at any rate free from reeds."

Weston threw the skin he had just before mentioned on the back of one of the horses, swung himself into this saddle, and followed his companion, leading the other two. The latter had already entered the thicket, and disappeared in the dark. A few minutes afterwards the breaking and cracking of the dried reeds might be heard as the horses made their way through them; then this noise too died away; the quiet of death lay on the wilderness, and the darkness of night covered sin and crime.

The reader must now be pleased to return with me to the ford mentioned at the commencement of the last chapter.

The four associates had not long disappeared under the dark shade of the trees, when, along the road, with pine torches in their hands, came the horsemen from the Spring-river, together with some farmers who had joined them in Pettyville.

"They went this way," exclaimed Harfield, stooping down in his stirrups, holding his torch as closely as possible to the ground—"there are the tracks of my horses; I will be hanged if their impudence is not beyond all bounds; they really gallop along the middle of the high road, all over the country, as if they were riding their own hacks. Wait awhile, you scoundrels, only wait. This time you shall not escape punishment."

"I really doubt whether they *will* wait," said Cook, laughing; "the traces do not look much like it. The deuce! how they dug their hoofs into the ground here! Harfield, we shall have to ride very sharply if we wish to overtake them by to-morrow."

"Of course we shall ride sharply, even if I do kill *these* horses. I would rather ruin them all than not see the wretches hanged;—yes, hanged, or I shall have no more quiet sleep."

"I fancied just now that I heard a cry—I mean as we were riding round that fallen oak," said Curtis. "Did you hear nothing?"

"Yes," replied Harfield, "I did; but it was probably a panther. There must be plenty of them about here."

"Certainly," said Cook, "especially in this part of the country. Only eight days ago I shot one; and there are plenty of trails to be seen."

"Where is the ford?" Harfield now asked, leaning back in his saddle. "Is there any deep place hereabouts which might be dangerous?"

"Yes; on the other side there are plenty such places," replied Curtis; "let me take the lead, I know the ground well."

With these words he let his horse go slowly down the steep bank, and, followed by the others in Indian fashion, one by one, he crossed the river.

"Do you see tracks?" asked Harfield, who brought up the procession.

"Yes, of course I do," returned Curtis; "besides, they could not go over at any other place. They went straight along the road, as true as my name is Curtis. We really are on the heels of their horses."

"Would it not be better," Cook suggested, "to throw away our torches now? If we happened to get near them, they would see the glare a good way off."

"That's true," Curtis replied; "we must extinguish the torches. If they keep upon the road, as I no longer doubt for a moment, we are sure to overtake them, and the burning pine torches could only do harm. Therefore away with them!"

Without waiting for a formal expression of assent on the part of his comrades, Curtis threw his torch in among the damp leaves, where it was immediately extinguished. Cook followed his example, while Harfield kept examining the ground with his, trying to make out the tracks.

"They went up here," cried Curtis; "the tracks are in the very road."

"You have trampled them out," said Harfield. "I will throw mine away now, and go on in the dark. I don't think we can miss the way."

"Impossible," replied Cook; "at least on such a night, for it will be daylight before we come to the place where the road gets too hard for us to see the traces."

"Well, forward then!" exclaimed Harfield, throwing away his torch. "Forward! and whoever first puts his hand upon the rascals may call upon me for a barrel of whisky."

The men answered with a loud hurrah. Away they bounded on the road towards the Hot Springs, at a quick gallop, following the wrong traces.

CHAPTER XIV.

BROWN ON HIS WAY HOME—THE MYSTERIOUS MEETING—THE INDIAN—THE OLD FARMER—TRIP IN THE CANOE.

During the twilight of the evening on which the events related in the last chapter occurred, the Pittsburg ferry-boat, rowed by two stout negroes, crossed the Arkansas, and landed on one opposite and southern shore of the river, the only passenger—a young pale-faced man, who grasped the bridle of his little shaggy pony. The traveller paid the ferrymen their fare, and throwing the bridle over his animal's neck, allowed it to spring from the boat, which it did very cleverly. It then ran about twenty paces up the bank, searching for and eating the grass which grew but scantily on the sandy soil, near the roots of some isolated beech-trees.

"But, massa," said one of the blacks, a genuine Congo negro, whose dreadfully large cheek-bones and a woolly moustache gave him a repulsive appearance, and whose hair looked more as if it had been burned by the sun than curled; "Massa," he said, after putting the half-dollar into a little dirty leathern pocket-book, and placing it with great care and caution in the large pocket of his cotton trousers, "I told you on the other side that there is not a house for seven miles, and massa will have to spend the night in the open air, and in the rain."

"I know that," replied the stranger, carelessly; "but how long is it since the cottage which stands not far from this

at the border of the little prairie, has been deserted? There used to be people in it—settlers from Illinois."

"Oh! for a very long time that has been uninhabited, massa," replied the negro. "The wife died, and the two children also; then the man went away. Before he left, he sold the little plot of land, with the cottage, to my master, in Pittsburg, and, as I have heard, went up the Mississippi to his home."

"Is the cottage still standing?"

"Yes, massa; but——"

"Well, but—there is no roof, perhaps?"

"Oh yes, massa; a good roof—everything is still quite in good order; but the people say that everything is not quite right in the house."

"Not quite right! What do you mean?"

"Well, the woman buried there, between the five peach-trees, is said,—she is said to——"

"To haunt the place, I suppose? You don't mean to say so?" continued the stranger, with a smile.

"Ahem!" said the two negroes, nodding mysteriously, and looking anxiously up and down the bank of the river.

"Why do they say so?" asked the white man, as he turned away to proceed on his journey. "Has anybody seen the ghost?"

Again the two negroes nodded their heads in a strange manner. Some more questioning was necessary, however, in order to elicit the necessary information about the haunted place. The negro who had spoken first at last declared that many dreadful stories were told of that spot, amongst which was one to the effect that the man, who quarrelled with his wife, killed her, and afterwards his two little children. By the steamer he escaped, and went nobody knew in what direction. The body of the woman was dug up in the presence of two magistrates, and examined by medical men, when the suspicions were confirmed. The very next day the bodies of the two children disappeared, and the mother might be seen at night searching for her little ones.

The negro had said all that he knew on this awful subject; and alarmed at the increasing darkness, without waiting for a reply, left the shore, wishing the stranger good night.

Directly after, the clumsy boat was heard on its passage across the river.

Brown—for the traveller was no other than our young friend, on his way back to the Fourche-la-Fave—watched it for a few minutes, as it grew more and more dim and indistinct in the thick mist which was gradually creeping over the surface of the water, and at last appeared only as a dark point, from which the measured stroke of the oars resounded sharply through the stillness of the night. At length this also died away—the boat had reached its destination; and, as if awaking from a dream, the young man sighed deeply, then mounted his pony, guiding it along the narrow footpath which led from the landing-place of the ferry to the plateau above.

On reaching this spot he rested for a minute, and gazed wistfully around. The landscape was overhung by dark masses of dreary-looking rain-clouds. A few hundred paces from the river the ground seemed to be thrown up by the rising of the mighty stream, and covered with the white sand peculiar to it for some distance. In many places beech and cotton-trees were half buried in it, and the ground itself resembled, with its long, wavelike undulations, a restless sea. Further on, where the power of the swelling waters had been broken by thickets of papao and plane-trees, the whole shining layer of sand lay like a soft covering of snow upon the fertile ground, stretching towards a point where the land, rising higher, seemed to act as a dam to the impetuous stream. Here luxuriant green grass formed the smooth carpet of a kind of prairie, which, however, presented the appearance of an extensive orchard, in which low bushy fruit-trees had been planted many years before by the Cherokees. The former proprietors of that tract of land had been driven away from their home, and compelled to seek a retreat farther to the west.

At the verge of this "Cherokees' orchard," as the place was called by the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, stood the little cottage already mentioned, which, according to the negro's statement, harboured such unpleasant guests. In spite of this, Brown turned towards that spot, and reached the haunted place by nightfall.

It was one of those little settlements which abound in the

Far West of America. A small block-house, in a very dilapidated condition, was situated in a long-neglected field, about two acres in extent. The fence had rotted away in some parts, and had been burnt in others. An out-house, quite in ruins, stood at the side. It might have served as a kitchen or offices; and a well, the opening to which was covered by a piece of a hollow tree, added to the desolation around. The place seemed to have been deserted for many years, and something so wild and so awful reigned around that Brown halted, almost involuntarily, just as he was about to pass the broken fence, and looked towards the neighbouring clump of trees, as if debating in his own mind whether it would not be better to encamp out in the open air, under the green trees of the forest, than to take refuge in the house, which might indeed afford a covering, but was otherwise by no means inviting. Suddenly a stronger gust of wind from the west, accompanied by a thin mist in the shape of a cold, drizzling rain, made him decide upon the course necessary to adopt. Without losing any more time, he led his faithful animal within the fence towards the little by-building, which he first of all examined, and found inhabitable. Indeed he was obliged to lift several by no means light trunks out of the way in order to obtain a passage for his pony; but then he had the satisfaction of knowing that his brave animal, which had carried him a long way that day, would have a dry resting-place, and one secured against the cold north-west winds. From a small bag which hung on his saddle he brought forth his pony's supper, consisting of Indian corn, which he poured into the small trough standing in a corner, and which, by the help of some small sticks, he fixed at a convenient height for the pony.

This done, the traveller next thought of his own couch, and stepped into the house, in order to rest his wearied frame under its protecting roof, and to strengthen it for renewed exertions. However cheerless and uninhabitable it might appear from the outside, the young hunter found that it must not long before have afforded shelter and protection to some other wanderer, for there were cinders in the chimney-place, and some embers still emitted a faint light. Nothing more fortunate could possibly have happened to him, and he brought in an armful of sticks, which he cut

with his hunting-knife into thin strips, and soon, to his great satisfaction, obtained a clear and glowing flame.

He brought his saddle and blankets into the room; the latter he spread out before the friendly flame, ate his very frugal evening meal, consisting of a little piece of dried stag flesh, and threw himself upon the couch, which, hard as it was, seemed quite comfortable to the weary wanderer.

These preparations for his own comfort, and that of his horse, had so entirely occupied the young man's attention, that no time had been left to him to reflect upon his position.

As he reclined before the sparkling embers, watching the narrow and unsteady circle of light emitted by the flashing fire, his heart opened, and he began seriously to reflect upon his chequered fortunes, and to endeavour to bring the future before his mind.

He fancied himself engaged in hot warfare with the Mexican soldiery, defending the freedom of a young nation; he pictured himself amid the thunder of the cannon, showering death and perdition—storming the enemy's batteries; he saw himself bleeding, in agony, among the fallen, on a glorious battle-field; and a triumphant smile passed over his pale features as he spasmodically grasped the rifle at his side, and with a proud and courageous look, half rising from his couch, stared into the dark starless night. Suddenly the image of the beloved one rose before him; he saw her, as she, like a beautiful victim, placed her hand in that of the man destined to be her husband;—he saw her grow pale—saw how anxiously she looked for help, looked for him—he heard her half-suppressed cry of suffering; and the strength of the proud, powerful man gave way under the feelings that rushed upon his soul. He covered his face with his hands, threw himself back upon his hard couch, and wept—wept as if his heart was breaking. This wild burning pain was at last succeeded by a calm, deep feeling of regret; he pressed his hand upon his violently beating heart, and covering his burning forehead in the rough bearskin of the saddle, which served him for a pillow, he prayed for the happiness of the beloved one, for solace of his own sufferings; and with the name of the dear girl upon his lips, slumber caught him in her tranquillizing embrace, and bore

him to the heart of her for whom he had sighed and aspired. It must have been about midnight when he awoke from his sweet dream, and found himself no longer before a warm fire, but the open chimney, through which the raging storm occasionally cast some cold drops in his face. The fire was completely extinguished, not even a spark remained, and, with a shiver, he drew his couch into a corner of the building which offered more protection against wind and weather, hoping to sleep away the time till dawn. He had hardly done this, when he fancied that he heard voices on the outside of the building. Suddenly the negro's tale, which he had almost forgotten, flashed across his mind, and leaning upon his right elbow, he felt carefully for his rifle and knife, anxious to have these weapons at his side. He then listened with breathless attention in the direction whence the sounds seemed to have proceeded. Nothing further was heard, and he was just sinking back upon his couch, with a smile on his countenance at his own absurd folly in thinking of ghosts, when again, and this time quite close at hand, he could distinguish the sound of human voices. Almost at the same moment somebody opened the door violently, and stepping into the narrow room exclaimed in a rough voice, "Accursed place! I really thought that I should not find it again in the dark. What weather! It is, however, good for our business."

"Hardly wet enough," replied another; "it has, perhaps, washed away some traces, but not all."

"The deuce take me if it is not wet enough for me. I shiver all over, and my teeth chatter in my mouth. If we could only light a fire."

"I wonder how we are to do that," observed the other. "Everything is wet, and I have not even a tomahawk with me to cut some chips. When I was here this afternoon I made a small fire, and covered it over with ashes before I went away, in order to keep it in; but now," he added, feeling about with his foot in the ashes, "now everything is as dark as night. However, we must not stay here long; at least, I must not; for by to-morrow evening I must be at home again, as our neighbourhood will be in a state of excitement during the next week or so. As soon as the weather has cleared a little, I shall go away."

"Our horses won't tear their bridles off in the meanwhile, I hope. We should have brought them in here."

"Decidedly not; in such weather they keep quiet and do not stir. No, I had an object in not bringing them in here; I do not wish to leave prints of their shoes about here. But now let us come to some determination. Time is precious, and we must make use of this short half hour granted to us just now. When do you think you will be back?"

Brown, whom the first surprise had completely paralysed, was not a little bewildered by the dark expressions in which the intruders praised this sort of weather as being favourable "for business;" and he really hardly knew what to do, whether to make himself known, or to remain quietly in his corner. The idea of playing the listener was unpleasant to him; and he was about to make his presence known by speaking to the men, when these last words, referring to the prints of the horses' hoofs, induced him to remain silent.

"Possibly these are members of the gang, for the suppression of which the Regulators have formed their association," thought Brown; and as the conversation proceeded, he was more and more confirmed in this suspicion. He accordingly drew his knife quietly from its sheath, for he knew well enough that if his presence were discovered he would have to fight for his life. Holding in his breath, he leant back in his corner, anxious to discover what plans might have brought these schemers to the deserted house, and hoping to gain some information that would enable him to defeat their wicked designs.

"When shall I be back?" replied the other, musing; "well, in a fortnight or three weeks, I suppose. The place is a good way off, and I must proceed very cautiously."

"Do not forget your caution at that little brook, before you come to my house," replied the other. "Should traces leading in the direction of my house be discovered by the Regulators, an investigation could hardly be avoided, and that might not do any more good to you than to me."

"To me? In what way could it affect me?"

"Well, if they get your horses, do you suppose I shall make your loss good?"

"I see—I understood you in another sense. No, don't be

afraid, I know too well what prudent measures it will be necessary to take; but stop, I just remember something else. Probably I shall only be able to transport the horses as far as the Washita, as I have business there, and also higher up the river, which will, I hope, bring in more. When this is done I shall call upon you, and we can then settle our accounts. I have one more observation to make. You may put full confidence in every respect in the man whom I send with the horses to your place; only—only do not trust him with any money for me."

"Don't be afraid. But will he know the spot at which he has to leave the road, before coming to my house?"

"Certainly. He was the first to describe it to me."

"Do I know him?"

"No, I think not."

"How shall I then be able to tell whether he is the right person, and the one to whom I may confide my secret?"

"Ha, ha, ha! he knows it well enough without that; but stop, that you may more easily understand each other, he shall ask you the way to the Fourche-la-Fave. You will answer that it flows past your house. His next question shall then be—'How is pasture in this neighbourhood?' And when he asks you in the third place for a drink of water, then open your door and heart to him—you will be assured that he is your man."

"Right. Such precautions are certainly necessary; for not only do I often receive visitors from this neighbourhood, but my ward, who lives in the house, must not know anything of the business. Never trust a woman's tongue. My goodwife knows about the affair, and that is dangerous enough. But good night, the rain has nearly ceased, and I must get home. It will be as well for you to leave this place as soon as you can. I only wonder that you still dare to come here, if only half of what is said of you be true."

"Children's tales," his companion muttered. "I don't think the weather will hold fair long; it is likely enough we shall have a wet morning."

"Perhaps not. In my opinion it begins to get colder, and if the wind should change to——"

"Well, what is the matter?" asked the man, as his comrade suddenly broke off in the middle of the sentence.

"I fancied that I heard a horse stamp upon the ground, quite close at hand," was the reply.

"Oh, nonsense!" said his associate; "the animals are a quarter of a mile off. But come, the weather really seems to be clearing up."

The door again opened—the intruders upon Brown's repose departed, and the quiet of death reigned in the deserted and dark hut. For a long while Brown remained motionless, wrapped in his blanket, and listened to the wind, which whistled through the chinks and crevices of the house, and played with the loose planks which formed the roof, whilst the forest outside waved and howled, trying, as it were, to stop the storm, which pursued its way in playful gambols over the broad plain of the Arkansas.

"Who could these men be, holding communication in such a night, and in such a place?" was the thought which at first entirely absorbed Brown's mind. There must be mischief in their plan, or they would have chosen their time and place better. But who were they? The voice of one of them in particular seemed to be familiar to Brown, and he distinctly remembered having heard it before; but whether in Arkansas, or in Missouri, or even on the other side of the Mississippi, he could not decide. While he was thinking the matter over, his ideas grew more and more confused; he closed his eyelids, pulled his blanket over his head, and in a few minutes was dreaming again. In his slumbers the two voices seemed more and more familiar to him; and now he could even distinguish quite plainly the figures of Marion and Rowson. The beloved one seemed to recoil from the embrace of the bridegroom, retreating further and further; and her pursuer, in advancing towards her, appeared in more and more extraordinary shapes. He threatened to seize her, and the poor girl at last, in inexpressible agony, began to cry for help, in the dark, stormy night.

Frightened to death by his vision, Brown threw off his blanket, and sprang upon his feet. The cold sweat stood upon his brow—but, after all, it was merely a dream. The owl uttered its monotonous, dreary morning song; the wolves responded from afar, and a dim light appearing in the eastern sky announced the approaching morn.

The air had in the meanwhile become bitterly cold;

the wind had changed to the north-east, and no clouds dimmed the pure blue firmament. Brown, to whom all the realities of the night seemed but a wild dream, stood still, lost in meditation, and again tried, but in vain, to connect the persons whose conversation he had overheard with scenes he had formerly witnessed. Rousing himself from this vain reverie, he began to think that after all his midnight visitors must have been strangers to him. He at once set about his preparations for continuing his journey, and in them endeavoured to forget the scenes that troubled his mind so much. He fed his pony with the Indian corn which was left. The faithful creature greeted him with a joyful neigh. Brown then led it to a small pool, formed by the late rains, and when it had quenched its thirst, saddled it, and pursued his journey at a brisk trot, before the sun had risen above the horizon.

The fresh morning air, as well as the rapid pace, imparted both to his body and his mind new vigour. The little courageous animal he bestrode trotted along through the swampy valley of the Arkansas until it came to the first low range of hills, and then feeling firm ground under its hoofs, flew across it, as if longing to greet once more its accustomed pasture-ground at home.

Suddenly our traveller perceived upon the broad road a man on foot, stepping nimbly along, and when he approached he recognised gladly, and to his unbounded astonishment, his Indian friend.

"Assowaum!" he exclaimed, quickly checking his pony, which, however, appeared as if it was about to stop of its own accord, as it recognised the red-skinned warrior. Indeed, it was a matter of course that the two friends should enter into conversation. "Assowaum! What in the world brings you this way? Whither are you bound?"

"Oh, not far," answered the Indian, quickly taking and pressing the hand stretched out to him.

"Then you have come to seek me? What has happened?"

"Much—very much! and does not my brother know anything about it?"

"I! how should I? Have I not been—but now I seem to understand the conversation of the two men last night;

their mysterious conference—who knows whether this may not be connected with what you have to tell me. But come, out with what you know. I am burning with curiosity."

"And so you really know nothing of what has happened?"

"My dear Assowaum, don't put on such a very grave face," exclaimed Brown, smiling. "When I was on the other bank of the Arkansas river, how could I know what was passing in Fourche-la-Fave?"

"But before you went away——"

"My quarrel with Heathcott?"

"Heathcott has been murdered!" said the Indian, gravely, while he cast an inquiring glance at the young man's face.

"Great God!" cried Brown, giving the reins a sudden jerk that caused his pony to rear. "That is horrible!"

"And suspicion rests upon *you*," continued the Indian, still fixing his eye upon him. "You are, however, supposed to be completely justified. The dead man had uttered wild menaces against you—he was just the kind of man to put them into execution; he was, perhaps, about to do so, and your deed is, everybody says, perfectly justified——"

"Assowaum!" exclaimed the young man, interrupting the Indian, springing from the saddle, and stepping up to his friend; "Assowaum, by that blue heaven which is spread out above us, the hand which I now raise is free from all stain of blood; I am innocent of this murder. I never saw the unfortunate man from the moment when we separated before Roberts's house. Do you still believe me guilty?"

With a smile the Indian stretched out his hand to him, and exclaimed, in a cheerful tone, "Assowaum never believed it; at least, not from the moment that he heard that the murdered man had been robbed."

"And am I accused of that, too?" the other asked, horrified.

"By bad men you are—the good ones know you better. Harper and Roberts do not believe a word of the story."

At the mention of Roberts, Brown buried his face in his hands, and leant with a sigh on the saddle of the pony that stood quietly at his side.

"Let me see your foot," said the Indian, as he drew his tomahawk from his belt.

"Why? Have you measured the traces?"

"Ahem!" said the savage, with a nod, holding the handle of his weapon to the sole of his friend's boot. "Three-quarters of an inch too long," he added, as if to himself, and with great satisfaction; "I thought as much."

"I did not even wear these boots on the morning when I left Fourche-la-Fave," said Brown, putting his hand into his saddle-pouch, "but these mocassins. Were they, then, traces of boots which you discovered at the place of the murder?"

"Ahem!" the Indian said again, with a nod. A new idea seemed suddenly to strike him; he placed the tomahawk upon the ground, and seemed as if engaged in comparing the measure on the handle with some other measure which he had impressed upon his memory. Then he suddenly looked at the young American in such a wild and strange manner, that the latter started back amazed, asking Assowaum what was the matter, and what he was thinking about.

"Nothing—nothing," said the savage, with a mysterious smile. "Come, we must go back—time presses. They think you guilty; evil-disposed men spread all kinds of rumours; and the little man has fallen ill, and he is quite alone. Alapaha is listening to the preaching of the pale man, and will not return until the evening. Will not my brother go to tell him himself that he is not guilty?"

"But where did the murder happen? How was it discovered?"

"Let us go on our journey; we can talk as we travel on. Assowaum must go to the Fourche-la-Fave."

With rapid strides the Indian hastened back by the road he had just come, and Brown was obliged to keep the pony at a sharp trot, not to fall into the rear. On the road the Indian told his friend all the circumstances which he longed to know; and in return, Brown related what he knew of the midnight conference of those two unknown men in the deserted house. The Indian stated that he had on that very morning met a man on a high brown horse; but he could not recognise his face, as he carefully concealed it in his blanket, which he drew more closely round at his approach.

"Perhaps he was one of the two," continued Assowaum, pointing to the prints of his horse's hoofs before them; "perhaps not. But here is the track, and we can follow it."

This search they were eventually compelled to abandon. When they came to the valley of the Fourche-la-Fave, the rain of the previous night, and the swelling of several little mountain brooks, had made the ground so swampy, that the Indian proposed to make for the river, which was not far distant, in a straight line, and to continue their journey in a canoe, of which he hoped to obtain the loan from one of the farmers near the river. If the Fourche-la-Fave once begins to rise, which always happens very quickly after such a rain, it then flows with astonishing rapidity towards the Arkansas; and although, in consequence of its tortuous course, the way is much longer by water, yet the distance could be more easily accomplished in a light boat, than by the heavy, though shorter road, through the mud.

Brown readily acquiesced in this plan, and was so much the more induced to do this, as he wished, if possible, to avoid Roberts's house, at which he would have been obliged to touch if he followed his present route. Avoiding the swampy valley, they followed the dry hilly ground which led towards the bank of the river, over which it hung in rugged and precipitous rocks. Nothing interfered to detain them, and they reached Singer's, one of the oldest settlers, before the sun stood very high in the firmament.

It turned out precisely as the Indian had predicted, and the river foamed between its rocky walls. The farmer advised the men not to trust themselves to the swollen current in a small and dangerous canoe, as they would have to pass places in which even the most expert swimmer would have no chance of saving his life. He willingly lent them his canoe, and promised to send the pony on the morrow, which was a Sunday, by his eldest boy to Harper's house. Brown preferred buying the canoe to borrowing it, as he wished to have one on the river near his uncle's house.

Their hospitable host placed before the weary wanderers wild turkey and honey, sweet potatoes, pumpkins, jam, and maize-bread, as well as a goblet full of genuine Monongahela whisky; and they neither of them required much persuasion to induce them to do justice to the proffered repast.

"Everybody is out again to-day," said the old man, as a little negro girl brought in the last dish, and filled the glasses of the guests with excellent fresh milk.

"What is in the wind, then?" asked Brown, taking the glass from his lips.

"There is a prayer-meeting to-day," the Indian observed, as he placed his knife beside him on the table, and took the wing of a bustard in his fingers. "The pale man cannot think very highly of the people at the Fourche-la-Fave; he makes them pray to their Great Spirit several times every week."

"That is true," observed the farmer, after having taken a good pull at the whisky goblet, which he then passed to Brown; "it begins to be rather too much for me. My neighbour here, Smith, has, with all his family, become suddenly *religious*, as they call it. There was no help for it, they would take my good wife with them; and she, for company's sake, took the girls with her. They have other things to think of, I presume, besides prayer-meetings."

"Women generally feel the want of these things more than we do," Brown remarked, thinking of the beloved one, and how often he had seen her taking part in these pious manifestations. "Our continual occupation leaves us but little leisure for these things; but to women who live more in themselves, and in the circle of home, religion becomes almost a part of their existence, and I do not blame them for clinging with love and veneration to those religious observances which the rougher being—man—can hardly cultivate to the same extent."

"My dear sir," said the old man, kindly, "Heaven defend that I should be angry with the female portion of my family for attending to these matters, or that I should stand in the way of their devotions; yet I do not believe that they have nothing else to do in the world but pray. The deuce take all female saints! That's *my* opinion, and I speak as I think."

Assowaum nodded his head in approbation, and said—

"I shall send Alapaha here; such a sermon would do her more good than those of the pale man."

"Do not misunderstand me," replied Brown; "Heaven knows how much I am averse to excess in all these things,

and I must confess that there is a tendency to such an abuse in these settlements; but the cause of it lies, perhaps, more in the people themselves than in the preacher. I, for one, believe that Mr. Rowson speaks from persuasion, and feels in his heart that which he preaches."

"That is more than I can say, in all honesty," exclaimed the farmer, moving to and fro impatiently in his chair. "I heard him but once, that's true; but, on that occasion, he most decidedly did not please me. That throwing up of the eyes is a bad sign. When a man begins to look like a sick chicken, I cannot fancy that he is really sincere. At any rate, I shall not trouble him again with my presence; but I really wish he would give my women-kind a holiday, at least one of them at a time, so that my home might be properly attended to. Away they go, with their large sun-bonnets on, their prayer-books under their arms, and late in the evening, when a decent Christian thinks of going to sleep, in they come like a hurricane, and even then, instead of retiring properly to rest, will sit for hours together in nooks and corners, talking of their sins, and declaring that they are wretched and miserable beings. If I did not know my people well, and if I was not assured that they are, the one a good, honest wife, the others brave, good children,—if I had to take them from their own description, why I should think them the most abominable ragamuffins that ever appeared upon this globe of ours. All this is caused by that eternal praying and sermonizing. A plague upon it! I do not mean to give myself out for an angel—I have done many a foolish thing; but I need not, on that account, creep about in the dust, and hold my mouth open in sheer astonishment that the earth has not opened to swallow me up—no; that would be rather too much for me. A little while ago the preacher was here too, and wished to hold a prayer-meeting. It came to nothing. I went about with him, showing him over the farm; I let him see all my animals, my horses and cows, my fields and pasture grounds. As to the preaching, I sent him higher up, to Halfer's, and so I got rid of him, but only for the afternoon; he persisted in holding the evening prayer-meeting at my place. He slept here, and I will be hanged if he did not remain, from nine o'clock to a quarter to ten, upon his knees

in the corner, running over a long list of all those blessings which, although he did not deserve, he desired. But you have done, and seem pressed for time. Well, my chattering shall not detain you any longer. You must, however, be careful with that nutshell of mine; the stream is very rapid just here, and an accident soon happens."

"No fear, sir," said Brown, smiling; "we both understand how to handle such a craft, and the rudder could not be in better hands than those of my Indian friend. You will not forget to send the pony to-morrow?"

"To Mr. Harper's house. You may rely upon it," said the farmer. "Your name is Harper, is it not?"

"My name is Brown."

"Brown!" cried the old man, hastily, and as if alarmed, while he fixed his eye upon the young man, who quietly met his look. "Brown! Not that Brown who——"

"Who is said to have killed the leader of the Regulators? The same, sir," replied the young man; "but," he added, stepping forward, his cheeks blushing with indignation, "it is a miserable calumny, and I am now on my way to set the matter right. I did not kill that man."

"He threatened your life," said the farmer, somewhat doubtfully.

"Yes," exclaimed Brown, with generous ardour, "and I should have killed him, and freely and openly confessed the deed, had he met me in fair fight. But the man has been, as the Indian here tells me, surprised by two assailants, murdered and robbed—and—do I look like a murderer?"

"No, certainly you do not," exclaimed the honest farmer, seizing the young man's hand. "No; I know little of you, but there is something honest and straightforward in your face; and as you say yourself it was not you, I will be hanged if I do not believe you. Yesterday my girls went down to Roberts's, and they said that Mr. Rowson's intended took your part very warmly."

"Assowaum, we must really be off," exclaimed Brown, turning suddenly to the Indian, who stood waiting for him at the door.

"I am ready—it is getting late," the Indian replied.

The young man once more shook hands with the farmer,

thanked him for all his kindness, but more especially for the confidence he showed in him, and expressed a hope that his innocence would soon be established. The men entered the boat, Assowaum took his seat in the stern, to steer the small craft, while Brown went to the bow. They both made their rifles fast to their bodies, so as to have them at hand in case of danger, and the small canoe, impelled by two powerful rowers, shot rapidly over the foaming waters, and disappeared in a moment behind the projecting rock which formed a kind of headland at a few hundred paces below the farm-house. It was lucky that they passed the most dangerous places ere night had closed in around them, especially some spots where birch-trees and willows, carried into the river, had taken root, and formed a dangerous obstruction to their course. As twilight set in, they reached the more shallow but broader part of the stream, and there was still light enough for them to distinguish anything that obstructed their passage.

Silently they glided along. Darkness covered the earth. They no longer rowed, but merely steered, when Assowaum suddenly called his companion's attention to a light which had just become visible in front of them.

"Strange! what can that be?" said Brown, turning towards it. "As far as the thick brushwood enables one to see, I fancy it must be a great many torches. In what part of the country are we now, I wonder? Is there a house on the bank near at hand?"

"Yes," said the Indian, guiding the canoe gently in that direction. "Yes; there is an uninhabited hut. Alapaha was there last night—we will land." And the next moment the little skiff touched the bank, to which it was speedily made fast by the Indian.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PRAYER-MEETING—A DREADFUL MESSAGE.

It was about two hours after noon when different groups might have been seen approaching from various directions

little log-house which stood alone in the wide, still forest. The owner, Mr. Mullins, was a new settler, an honest and industrious man, who had in a short space of time cleared and cultivated a good-sized plot of land. The house itself showed no traces of comfort or improvement. It stood, contrary to the usual custom of the farmers in the Far West, almost half a mile from the field, on the slope of a little rocky eminence which formed the first part of the ridge that divides the waters of the Fourche-la-Fave from those of the Petite-Jeanne. Around the dwelling, in wild disorder, might be seen felled trees and fence-poles, which indeed gave the place a new, but also a rather uncomfortable and dismal appearance.

However deserted and lonely the spot might have looked all the morning, it suddenly became quite animated, and there was scarcely a bush without a horse attached to it, nor the stump of a tree that did not serve as a resting-place to a group of men chatting cosily together; while the women stepped into the house to take off their bonnets and shawls, and to arrange their toilet a little previous to the arrival of the preacher. The sins and shortcomings of their neighbours offered a theme of discussion. They were, no doubt, actuated by the friendly desire of throwing a veil over them, although they were very careful to run over the list.

"It is very strange that Mr. Rowson has not arrived yet," said Mrs. Palter to Mrs. Mullins; "he generally is so very punctual."

"He will come with Roberts, probably," was the answer. "In three weeks the wedding is to come off; and he is probably with his intended."

"What wedding?" asked three or four others, pressing near. "Is it really true that Mr. Rowson is going to marry Marion?"

"I had it from her own mother; and I should think she was a likely person to know. Do not say that I told you this, as it is as yet a secret. But look; the Robertses are coming without Mr. Rowson! Well, I really cannot make out what——"

"Why, he has gone to the Arkansas," observed a relative of Barill's; "perhaps he has so much business to do there that he cannot get back at the appointed time."

"That would be a great pity," sighed the youngest Miss Smyers. "I have been longing to hear another sermon."

"Oh, he is sure to come," cried old Mrs. Smyers, a portly matron. "We really stand in need of his admonitions in this settlement. What wickedness threatens to overwhelm us!"

"In spite of this, there are people who don't even think of praying," said Mrs. Barill—"people who never go to any prayer-meeting, not even when it is held next door to them—people who swear and——"

"Oh, if I could but once prevail upon my husband to hear the word of God," said Mrs. Hostler. "He promises me every time, and never keeps his word."

"You must manage as I did with mine some time since," replied Mrs. Hennigs. "One afternoon he had stretched himself out quietly in the corner for a nap, and when he awoke the room was full of people, and the preacher from the other side of the Petite-Jeanne was just beginning to offer a prayer. You should have seen what eyes Hennigs made; but he could not help himself, and so he had to stand it. After two or three more lessons of that sort, I am persuaded that he will come of himself, and then he will perhaps learn to value the privilege."

"Mr. Hennigs told my husband," said Mrs. Smith, "that he would bring his dogs into the room the next time he intended to take a nap, and they would be sure to bark if anybody intruded."

"Let him do that if he dares," exclaimed Mrs. Hennigs, quite incensed; "the dogs upon my beds; that would be good! I should like to see who would be master. Good evening, Mrs. Roberts," she continued, changing the subject, as that lady stepped into the house with her daughter. "How are you, Miss Marion?"

Salutation was now the order of the day, and the women were fully engaged examining and criticising the finery of the new-comers, and thus had really overlooked the important fact of Mr. Rowson's arrival, who with a bland countenance pressed in amongst them. The change that had taken place in his appearance astonished everybody. His face was pale, his cheeks were hollow, his eyes sunken, and his voice trembled remarkably. It was also noticed that his left arm hung strangely at his side.

"Mr. Rowson!" exclaimed the women, with one voice, "are you ill? what is the matter with you? Why, you look pale as death!"

"You must be ill," said Mrs. Roberts, stepping up to him; "or is anything the matter with you?"

"No—nothing, I thank you," replied the preacher, with a friendly smile. "Really, I thank you for the interest you take in me, my dear friends and sisters; but it is nothing more than over-exertion. I came from the northern settlements, and have been on horseback all night. I was determined to keep my word and to be here at the appointed time, and that has hurt me a little, as I am not much accustomed to such arduous work."

He stepped up to Marion and stretched out his hand. She observed the strange manner in which he carried his left arm, and asked him kindly whether he had hurt himself.

"It is not worth speaking of," replied the preacher, "and will soon be well. My horse yesterday evening stumbled over a branch which lay in the way, and threw me against a tree. It bruised my arm a little. It was but a scratch, and I did not pay any attention to it; but as we had a very wet night, it got inflamed towards morning, and is now somewhat stiff. However, it will, as I said before, soon be well."

"Oh, Mr. Rowson, I have some excellent ointment," said Mrs. Mullins, approaching him, "if you would allow me——"

"Thank you—I am much obliged for all your kindness; it is not worth all this trouble. Even if it was of much greater importance than it is, I would not be the cause of preventing so many pious and believing souls from approaching their Lord. Let us begin, my dear friends. You see how the good have flocked together. Shall we remain in the house, or go into the open air? Perhaps, as regards space, the open air will be preferable."

"Will it not be too cold for you in the fresh air?" said Mrs. Roberts, anxiously; "there is a cold and wet wind blowing."

"Do not be anxious on my account," said the preacher, pressing her hand, with a smile. "I am in the service of the Lord, and must not neglect my duties. The ceremony will do me good, and in a few days I hope to have entirely recovered."

Further entreaties were of no avail. The little table was placed beneath the two mulberry-trees which the farmer had left in front of his house, and soon after the shrill, loud voice of the preacher might be heard in prayer and thanksgiving. The trees did not fall down and crush him—the earth did not swallow up the hypocrite who raised his blood-stained hands to the All-powerful, and thanked him for having blessed his feeble efforts, and for having collected all his pious and believing people under the blue sky. No avenging lightning struck down the lying traitor as he asked forgiveness for those who neglected the opportunity of hearing the word of God. Calmly he stood, and did not blush in the full face of heaven. There he stood, and did not quail when the women about him whispered to each other "that a glory seemed to surround his temples." There he stood, and did not cast down his shameless eye as he met the pure and really pious looks of his intended, who now for the first time regarded him with favour, believing that eagerness in his vocation had changed him. That evening, for the first time, Marion believed that she could become, if not happy, at least contented as his wife.

Rowson brought the service to an end with imperturbable calmness. His lips did not quiver when he asked pardon of the Almighty One for himself and his audience; his voice did not tremble as he uttered the benediction. Once only, when all around him were upon their knees, a sudden pang seized him, and he paused for a few seconds; for high, high above the waving tops of the oaks, he saw flying towards the north-west four buzzards. He could not hear the heavy beatings of their wings, but he knew their destination—he knew what their meal would be before the sun could sink in the west. Gathering all his strength, he gave out a hymn, and thus brought the service to a conclusion.

Some of the settlers seemed to stand aloof from these religious proceedings, and they had collected in a small group, and squatted down about a hundred and fifty paces from the assembly. Amongst them were Bahrens, Hartford, the storekeeper, Roberts and Wilson; the latter also a new settler on the same river, though on the other side. Conversation on bad times and failing harvests had gradually ceased. The loud exhortations of Rowson reached them where they stood, and

Bahrens was in the act of putting back into his pocket a little whisky-bottle which he had intended to hand round, when Wilson observed his movement, and seized the arm which was about to deprive him of his consolation.

"Stop!" he said, "that is against the rules of society, first to show one the real stuff, and then to put it away again; no, that wont do."

"But, Wilson—if Rowson should look this way—or one of the women?"

"Oh, nonsense! they must have sharp eyes indeed if they could tell what we were doing through all this brush-wood. And should they after all discover our occupation, what need we care for that? We did not come here to join in their devotions."

"Well, don't let it be seen more than you can help," said Bahrens; "my good wife is singing with them, and I should never hear the last of it were she to notice what we are about."

"Don't be afraid, old boy," said Wilson, laughing. He turned his back upon the pious company, raised the bottle to his lips, and seemed to be regarding the blue sky above for some moments with peculiar attention.

"Well," said Roberts, taking the flask, "you mean to empty it, do you? You ought to have paid a little better attention to Rowson's moral, 'to do unto others as you would they should do unto you.'"

"Oh, go to the deuce with your moral," said Wilson, rather vexed, stretching himself out beneath the shade of the pine-tree under which he had been sitting, and looking up into the thick branches above him. "I am growing quite sick of this sort of thing. What brave fellows we used to be here—fellows who did not care about having a hat upon their heads, or shoes to their feet. I do not like this sneaking fellow, with his crafty ways; I beg your pardon, Roberts, he is going to be your son-in-law; I did not think of it."

"Fire away!" cried the old man; "don't mind me. I think perhaps just as you do. Fire away!"

"In that case, you know what I meant to say. I am tired of that canting fellow. I cannot forget that new settler, the German, who came here three months ago. He wished to go from his home to Kellwefers by the shortest road, and

asked Curtis to point it out to him. Now Curtis told him plainly and properly enough that he had to keep due west at first, through the reedland, until he came to the open wood at the holly-bush thickets, when he was to turn a little to the north. After that, he was told to go again due north, as far as the small lake, and thence, leaving the lake on his left hand, to go almost due east, otherwise he would get into the county road too high up. That was plain enough, and one would think it was quite impossible for a man with his five senses about him to miss the way. But Recken had hardly got into the thicket ere he began to turn round and round like a top, and in the evening when I arrived there to get a bustard I heard him shouting. I have tried it myself several times, and have sent others with the same directions; but they always got wrong, and now they are going to cut a road through, so that they will be able to find their way."

"There is some truth in what you say," Bahrens observed, laughing. "Be it as it may, I do not like the preacher more than you do."

"My wife is quite taken with him," said Roberts. "Only last night she argued that he was a saint. She added, that her heart felt relieved directly he entered the room."

"Look!" cried Wilson, interrupting the conversation, "how the buzzards keep flying over there this afternoon. This is the twenty-third I have counted since I have been lying here."

"The sermon seems to be over," said the storekeeper, who had been listening silently to the conversation for several minutes. "That's the closing hymn—I know it."

"You are musical, Hartford, are you not? I believe you class this amongst your other accomplishments," said Bahrens, laughing.

"Oh yes, a little," the storekeeper replied, rather vexed. "I play the violin, and know a few first-rate pieces on the flute. If you wont believe me, I have it here;" and with these words he put his hand into his coat-pocket, and was about to draw out the instrument, when Roberts seized him by the arm, and said—

"For mercy's sake, man, keep that dreadful thing in your pocket. What do you suppose the good folks there would

think of us, if we were to begin a concert here? We had such a joke last year, at Wells's place, down there. You know Wells, who lives quite retired, and does not go anywhere, unless he gets very particularly invited to a feast, or something of that kind. A short time ago he was at my place, after he had found that bee-tree close to the river, for he wanted an axe, and would not go for it home first, and——"

"Yes, but," interrupted the storekeeper, ignorant of Roberts's strange habit, "you were going to speak of music——"

"Oh, why did you stop him?" said Bahrens, laughing; "he had just started, and would soon have found himself somewhere in New Orleans, or New York."

"Nonsense," said Roberts; "you are talking sheer nonsense again. I was thinking neither of New Orleans, nor New York. I was going to tell you of Wells, whose neighbour had just such another long thing with holes in it, exactly like a flute, only one had to put it to one's mouth at the end, instead of the side. He had been staying for the night at Smith's, and in the evening, as people were going to prayers, he takes—he had come down from Fort Gibson not long before that, and did not know our ways, and had been living, I believe, some time on the Indian frontier, and used to tell with a remarkable relish what eternal war and strife they had with the Choktaws, who just then were being brought from Georgia to the West—I really was sorry myself at the time for the poor devils, for they have been shamefully cheated out of their land. Grand people came from Washington and New York——"

"Hurrah!" cried Bahrens, who had been watching anxiously for this termination of his friend's speech. "I was quite sure that he would land there."

"Don't shout so awfully," said Wilson; "they are looking this way. But, bless me, it is all over. Rowson has made it unusually short."

"He looks miserable enough," observed Roberts; "I really was quite startled when I met him at the corner of the fence."

"At the corner of the fence? I thought he had come from higher up, from the northern settlements," said Wilson.

"Well, so he might," replied Bahrens; "three miles from

this he might have turned to the right, in order to evade the swampy places, and in that case he would come out at the corner of the fence."

The meeting had, indeed, broken up, and all were now in motion. Mrs. Bahrens approached our little merry group, got hold of her "old one," as she called him, and lectured him for the next quarter of an hour; while Wilson made signs to Roberts, asking him whether he knew what kind of conversation they were holding.

"Children, it is getting late," said Smith, at last, who was a constant attendant at the prayer-meetings, and was supposed to be a very pious man. "It is very near sunset, and I have several miles to go. Wilson, you will accompany me, wont you?"

"Hardly," he replied; "I have promised Bahrens to ride home with him; he wants to tell me of some adventure he had last week."

"Well, that *will* be nice," said Mullins, laughing; "let me know of it, when it is done."

"That you may grin at it, eh?" said Bahrens. "No, I have grown a little more cautious with my tales, for——"

"Bless me, how strangely that new-comer stares about him!"

This last exclamation was caused by the appearance of a man from the thicket. He stepped suddenly in amongst them, with such a ghost-like and frightful appearance. With vacant, wandering gaze, he looked around him, and several of the women drew back in alarm, while Wilson sprang up, and cried—

"Holway!—the deuce!—have you lost your reason, that you run about in broad daylight, looking like a corpse, and terrifying people? What has happened?"

"Something horrible!" groaned the young man, sinking down on the trunk of a tree. "Something horrible!" he repeated, in a hollow tone of voice. "Over there, in the old log-house——"

"Well, what is it?" asked a dozen voices at the same time.

"Only give me breathing time, and I will tell you. In the old log-house—lies—I shudder to think of it—lies the dead body of the Indian woman—she has been murdered!"

"Alapaha!" cried the hunters, perfectly horrified. "Assowaum's wife! It is horrible! dreadful! How came you

to make the discovery? In what way was she killed? How does she look? Who is her murderer?" and a hundred similar questions, were poured forth from different speakers with the rapidity of lightning.

"I know nothing about it," said Holway; "only give me time to collect myself. I ran all the way from that place of horror in a few seconds; fear seemed to give me wings."

"Come, tell us what has happened."

"I will. Listen. I had been at the mouth of the river last week hunting, and I set out on my return home yesterday, intending to fetch some dried skins I had concealed in a secret hiding-place. I hoped to reach Tanner's house yesterday, but night came on, and I bivouacked on the bank of the river, in the thick reeds. How many a night have I already spent alone in the forest! How many a hurricane, and even thunderstorm, have I weathered, without experiencing the least alarm! Strange to say, yesterday a cold sweat came over me, and I twice stirred up my fire, in order to make a good blaze. I must have had some foreboding of what was then passing close to me. Silence reigned around, my dog barked once, and I had an impression that a horse neighed near me. That must, however, have been a mistake, as the reedland is quite impenetrable, and the river close at hand is very deep. Hoswell had promised to lend me his canoe, but I did not go for it the first thing in the morning. I saw a lot of bees swarming, and, until about noon, kept looking about trying to find their comb, but did not succeed. I then went after the canoe, but met with no better success. I crept round all the bends in the river, as far as I could, but did not discover anything except a pocket-handkerchief, with some provisions, which some hunter must have hung up in the bush and then forgotten, and so I went up the little path, intending to swim across the river.

"My intention was to ascend the left bank for about two miles, in order to get another canoe, which a farmer higher up keeps. I could not help noticing how all the buzzards seemed to fly in one direction, darting down at a spot not far out of my path. Two fresh tracks showed that wolves had very recently crossed my path in the same direction, and I resolved—having nothing particular to do—to go and see what kind of game they might be in search of. Gracious

heavens! I was not prepared for the spectacle that met my gaze. When I reached the little plot, thickly overgrown with underwood, in which the hut stood, I made certain that one of the pigs, which are always thereabouts, had fallen a prey to some hungry bear. I was the more inclined to take this view from having early in the morning observed the traces of one in the sand on the bank of the river. The fact that none of the buzzards were upon the ground, rather startled me; they were all perched in the branches of the trees around the hut, flapping their wings greedily as I approached."

"And the wolves?"

"I did not notice their tracks; I knew now that what attracted them must be in the hut; and, without a thought of meeting with a human body—I will spare further details—I found the dead body of the Indian woman. A glance was enough; I ran out of the hut more quickly than I had entered, and hastened to the nearest house. A little negro girl told me that nobody was at home, as all had gone to the prayer-meeting; and, as if impelled by some mysterious power, I rushed here, anxious to meet with human beings."

"But do tell us——"

"Nothing; I can tell you nothing; you must come and see for yourselves, and at once. The corpse must not, upon any account, be allowed to remain there another night. The wolves, which were to-day afraid of entering the place once inhabited by human beings, would gain sufficient courage with the return of night, which will now soon be here, and they would tear the body to pieces."

"Where is Assowaum?" asked Roberts. "Perhaps he is already on the track of the murderer."

"Would he have left the corpse of his squaw unburied?" observed Bahrens. "No; never."

"Surely Assowaum himself has not committed this crime?" said Smith, looking shyly around. "He was always averse to her attendance at the prayer-meetings of the white people, and often scolded her for having embraced Christianity."

"I should more readily believe that she had been killed by her own mother than by Assowaum," exclaimed Roberts,

warmly; "I know how much he loved her. But we must away; time presses, and the hut is a good step off. Have you any pine-wood in the house?"

"Plenty," said Mullins, "and all cut ready too; I wanted it to go to the salt-pool to-morrow evening; but it is more needed in this case. We can break up at once. Where is Rowson?"

"Here!" said the preacher, who had been leaning, unobserved by any one, against a tree. "We must go instantly in order to investigate this horrible deed, and to endeavour to discover the murderer."

"At any rate, Mr. Rowson," said Mrs. Roberts, "you really must remain here; you are ill, seriously ill; indeed, you look as pale as death."

"I believe that it is my duty to go," replied the preacher, "though I have a violent headache."

"No—we cannot allow you to stir," exclaimed Mrs. Mullins; "the horrid spectacle would only make you worse."

"I hardly know what to say, my dearest sister Mullins."

"You had better remain here," said Roberts, taking part in the conversation; "you look very unwell, and we really do not require your assistance. To-morrow, at the funeral, it will be different; then we shall, if you feel stronger, apply for your services."

The preacher acquiesced with seeming reluctance, and was in the act of turning round, in order to enter the house, when Marion approached him with a timid, gentle look, and taking his hand, whispered, "Good night, Mr. Rowson, I should advise you to lie down, and I hope you will be better to-morrow. Good night!"

These were but common and simple words of ordinary courtesy. As they fell upon his ears from the lips of the lovely girl, they seemed to pierce his innermost soul; and terrified—annihilated—he almost started back at the touch of the innocent young woman, when his eye met the glances of the crowd, his old sternness returned, he drew the blushing girl towards him, and pressed a light kiss upon her forehead; he then invoked a blessing upon her head, and stepped into the house, anxious to get to bed as soon as

possible, in accordance with the suggestions of the female members of his congregation.

"What an angel!" murmured Mrs. Smith, clasping her hands, and looking after him with an earnest gaze.

"He is a real saint," said Mrs. Pelter, who stood near her, and caught the words; "the good soul turned pale as death on hearing of the dead body, and he really began to tremble. Oh! what a feeling heart he has!"

"Marion ought to thank Heaven on her bended knees for giving her such a treasure of a husband," said Mrs. Smith.

"When will the marriage come off?" asked Mrs. Pelter.

"It wont be long now," observed Mrs. Smith, "for this very day—but they are separating already. Shall we women join them?"

"Oh no—certainly not!" said Mrs. Bahrens. "I do not think my good man would like me to go with him on such an excursion; I shall ride home. But we will all meet here again for the funeral to-morrow."

"Decidedly," replied Mrs. Smith, leading her horse to a large stump, and mounting into her saddle.

Most of her friends followed her example; and soon after the men set off on their nimble little ponies, and just as the sun sunk behind the western mountain ranges, the female portion of the congregation quitted the place. They did not forget to enjoin the busy hostess to take great care of the invalid preacher, and to leave numerous messages for their spiritual friend; while the good woman promised to take as much care of the sick preacher as if he had been her own child.

CHAPTER XVI.

OBSEQUIES.

From Mullins's house to the old log-hut was about four miles in a straight line. The men accomplished this distance in an incredibly short space of time, and it was not quite dark when they reached the little "dead clearing," as such once cultivated but deserted places are commonly called in the language of the country. Here Roberts stopped, made

his pony fast to the branch of a tree, and was followed by all his companions. The first thing to be done was to strike a light. Though the party amounted to sixteen in number, not a word was spoken. They collected some sticks in silence, and soon got a flame, and, led by Roberts and Wilson, they approached with beating hearts the scene of horror.

The leaders stepped into the hut, and at once perceived the body of the unfortunate woman, who had evidently fallen before some strong assailant. The others pressed in behind them, and formed a circle round the victim; while the pine torches cast a lurid glare upon the awful scene.

"She has been murdered," said Roberts, at last, in an undertone; and the assembly repeated—"Murdered!"

This was no longer doubtful. A cut across the head, evidently inflicted by an American bowie-knife, was enough to have caused death. In addition to this, her body bore three wounds, from which the blood had flowed copiously. The Indian woman seemed to have defended herself vigorously, as the ground was trodden down. At the first blow the unfortunate woman must have fallen senseless.

"Have any of you the least suspicion in what manner and by whom this unfortunate woman came to an untimely end?" asked Roberts.

Nobody answered. At last Bahrens said—"It is impossible to penetrate into men's hearts, or to see what is plotting and working in them. This poor Indian woman appeared to me so brave and good, so friendly and affable, that I cannot conceive why or wherefore she should have had a single enemy in the settlement. I know of none whom I could think capable of acting so cruelly."

"Nor I—nor I," was the answer re-echoed on every side.

"When was the unfortunate woman last seen?" asked Wilson.

"I met Alapaha and Assowaum yesterday afternoon on the other side of the river," replied Pelter; "they seemed to be very friendly. But who can sound the depths of an Indian's heart?"

"Assowaum is innocent!" exclaimed Roberts, emphatically. "I would venture my life on that."

"Innocent of what?" from the doorway, in deep and

sonorous tones, the Indian, who at this moment, followed by Brown, joined the group, inquired. He then stepped towards the middle of the hut, while the men on both sides made room for him, so that he had not the least intimation of the dreadful surprise that awaited him, until he actually bent over the body of his wife.

"Waugh!" he cried, springing up in agony like a stag hit by a bullet; "what is this?"

"Alapaha!" exclaimed Brown, horror-stricken—"Alapaha! and she has been murdered!"

"Murdered!" repeated, in wild and hollow tones, the Indian, whose eyes seemed starting from their sockets; while his hand involuntarily grasped his sharp scalping-knife, as if anxious to bury it in the heart of the assassin who had killed his wife. "Who says murdered?"

"Does this look like guilt, men of Arkansas?" asked Roberts, putting his hand upon the Indian's shoulder and glancing proudly at his comrades.

"No—certainly not! The poor Indian! This is dreadful! Who has done the deed?" such and similar exclamations were uttered by the farmers; while Assowaum with piercing gaze regarded everybody who pronounced a word, and seemed for the moment to have lost all consciousness.

Brown then stepped up to Roberts, saying, in a low tone of voice, as he pointed to the corpse before them—

"This is the second victim which has fallen by an assassin's hand in the short space of one week. Rumour has laid at my door the guilt of the first foul deed. I have come here to roll back the accusation—to prove my innocence. My heart is free from such dreadful guilt; but the murderer lives amongst us. A short time since it was my intention to quit this State, and to go to Texas. Such is still my resolve; but I shall not depart until the criminal has been discovered that struck this blow—until my name has been fully vindicated from this charge in the eyes of the world. Not only my plans, but even my views have changed. You know, men of Arkansas—that is to say, many of you, at least, who are most intimate with me, are aware of my having hitherto disapproved of the proceedings of the Regulators. I thought the illegal manner in which they had been induced to assemble and take up arms was a sufficient ground

to condemn them. I no longer think so. Here at our feet lies the murdered body of one who, in her childlike innocence, never hurt nor injured anybody. Which of you has not been often pleased by her modesty and affability? Whose heart has not been touched by her earnest and genuine piety, that induced her to abandon even the creed of her fathers? Well, she is dead. The laws have been powerless to protect her; the laws cannot reach and punish her murderer. Here, then, I raise my hand, and swear that I will not rest until her blood has been avenged, as well as that of the unfortunate Heathcott. I will not rest until we have found out and punished that brood of serpents which hide at our very hearths. Men of Arkansas, will you aid me with your arms and your hearts?"

"We will," they all replied, in low but earnest tones. "We will, as we hope that Heaven will be merciful to us!"

"Let us, then, first of all carry the body to the nearest house. To-morrow we will summon the preacher, who is, no doubt, somewhere in the settlement, and we will then bury the poor woman."

Several of the party began to cut down and prepare sticks, in order to make a rough kind of bier. Assowaum, who had hitherto stood in silence near the corpse, with his eyes fixed upon the features of his dead wife, gently pushed those near him away, and made a movement with his hand as if he wished them to quit the hut.

"What do you wish us to do, Assowaum?" asked Brown.

"Leave me alone," said the warrior, putting his knife back into its sheath. He had held it open in his hand from the commencement of the sad scene. "Leave me alone with Alapaha—only this one night."

"Will it not be better for us to——"

An impatient movement on the part of the Indian induced them not to oppose him further. In silence they all retired, and having deliberated a few seconds at the door of the hut as to what might be the best course to adopt, departed.

"Would it not be better for us to squat here outside?" said Bahrens, when they had proceeded a little distance, and reached a rather open place. "Assowaum will then perform his sad duties undisturbed, and to-morrow we shall be upon the spot, without losing any time."

"That is a good plan, no doubt," said Brown; "but Assowaum told me on the road that my uncle is ill, and that he had sent Alapaha to him with some food. It seems that as the unfortunate woman was killed, the sick man is now lying in his hut alone and helpless. I must go to him, at the latest, early to-morrow morning. Would it not, in that case, be better for us to go back at once to Mullins's? We should then see how Rowson is, and ascertain whether he is capable of attending to the funeral to-morrow. In the morning we might bring the Indian some food. We can then take Alapaha in the canoe to her own hut, which is close to our dwelling. I know the Indian will wish to have his wife buried close to his wigwam."

"While the river is in this state, not more than four persons can sit in the canoe," said Wilson.

"That does not matter," replied Brown. "From Mullins's to Harper's, if you go straight through the wood, is not more than six miles. Wilson and I will undertake to bring away the Indian and the dead body, while the rest of you go through the wood with the preacher. In that way we shall all arrive at my uncle's at about the same time."

"Well," said Bahrens, "I agree. Ought we not, however, before quitting the spot, to endeavour to discover some traces of the murderer?"

"That would be vain," observed Roberts, "the rain which poured down after midnight must have washed them completely away, and we should be losing our time. No, the murderer is for the present quite safe from all pursuit. Whoever he may be, he will not escape our vengeance. Neither the pious and chicken-hearted exhortations of a preacher, nor the menaces of a governor, shall keep us from acting according to the dictates of our indignation. This outrage drives us to extremities."

"I should like to go and see what Assowaum is doing," said Brown, almost timidly.

"Do not disturb him again to-night," said Roberts; "these Indians have peculiar notions and feelings, and I hardly think that he could bear the sight of a white man just now, though he might be a friend."

The men lighted their pine-torches, most of which had been extinguished, mounted their horses, and rode slowly

back to Mullins's house. In the lonely log-hut, the Indian remained watching by the dead body of his wife. The white men had destroyed their tribe, and now one of their number had lifted up his hand against the feeble woman who relied on their protection. In the dark blue sky a host of stars shone in all their midnight glory. The gentle breeze played with the tops of the lofty trees. The river roared and foamed wildly as it dashed along near the desolate hut, and it almost seemed as if its greedy waves clamoured for the bloody corpse, desirous of making it their plaything.

In the inner room, heedless of the murmur and roaring of the waves, at the feet of his dead wife, sat the Indian. He gazed silently and sorrowfully on her painfully disfigured, bloody, and yet still beautiful figure. The fire had almost burnt out, and only now and then cast a reddish glare around, making darkness visible and more awful. All at once, and as if stung by an adder, the red son of the forest sprang to his feet, his eyes starting from their sockets; with trembling hands he threw into the almost extinguished fire all the dry chips near him, stirred it up with spasmodic haste till he produced a high blaze, and then turned to the corpse, regarding with anxious solicitude the beautiful features.

Alas! the uncertain flash of light had deceived him. He fancied that the motionless features moved, that the pale lips were opening; he could not believe that the wife of his heart, his Alapaha, was lying dead—dead at his feet. To every faint ray of hope he clung with the force of despair, his sinking soul quivering with pain. Soon, however, the unfortunate man felt the certainty of the awful truth. Alapaha, the flower of the prairies, was really dead. His loving look met but a corpse deprived of feeling and soul, and with deep sighs he let the glowing brands fall from his powerless hand.

The momentary hope had at least aroused him from his lethargy; he put his long hair back from his forehead, gazed around as if incredulous for some seconds, and trembled again as his glance once more fell upon the inanimate form of the beloved one.

The wolves, which the night before had not dared to approach the dwelling, emboldened by hunger now drew near the place which contained their prey. Yet the scent of so

many fresh footprints somewhat checked them. Their fear was augmented by the presence of a living being, and they ran round the dwelling, howling their plaintive and discordant dirge.

Assowaum did not heed them; he knew the hyænas of the forest, but did not fear them; and was fully occupied with the former object of his love, now of his grief. Again he stirred up the fire, that lighted the walls of the hut for a moment as if with the splendour of day; and he then looked about, trying to discover traces or marks that might serve as a clue to show the perpetrator of the deed.

The hut, erected many years before by a new settler, who abandoned it soon after, had since that time been visited only occasionally by lonely hunters, as a place of refuge in stormy weather. It was consequently entirely neglected, and had fallen into ruins. In former times its owner had cultivated a little piece of ground close to it, where he had grown Indian corn; but the brushwood had almost effaced all signs of cultivation, although even in the interior of the hut some young stems betokened the uncommon fertility of the soil. At the side of one of these the corpse was stretched out, and Assowaum looked in vain for traces which might give him a clue to the murderer. The ground had been so much trodden down, that no particular footprints could now be distinguished. In spite of this, close to the little wooden frame on which Alapaha had cured the flesh of the stag the day before, Assowaum discovered in the ashes, where the farmers had not been, part of a man's footprint. Assowaum observed it closely and attentively. He could not make out the length, as only the fore part of the foot remained. It seemed to have been made by the kind of boot Brown used to wear. It might be, after all, the footprint of the young man who had only just left the hut. Assowaum measured the print, and marked it upon the handle of his tomahawk. Then he remained standing before the fire, looking into it for several minutes with a vacant stare.

This discovery did not satisfy him; he looked about, searching eagerly for some object the murderer might have left, and found his wife's tomahawk, which was covered with blood, and had been thrown by some savage hand into a corner of the hut, and thus it had escaped his eagle eye.

A proud and triumphant smile for the first time passed over the features of the wild warrior, as he observed the traces of blood on his wife's light, yet deadly weapon. Alapaha, then, had died in a manner worthy of an Indian woman, and the enemy who had killed her had first bled by her hand. This, while affording satisfaction, also revived ideas of vengeance with renewed violence in his mind. Grasping the tomahawk firmly in his hand, the warrior drew himself up, and looked round with flashing eyes, as if he fancied that he was about to see the murderer, and, with the cry of vengeance upon his lips, to strike him to the earth.

Alas, it was now too late! Where had that avenging hand been in the hour of need? Where was that strong arm in the moment of danger?—Far, far away; and his poor wife fell an almost helpless victim. Assowaum gnashed his teeth in useless rage, as if such thoughts flashed through his mind; but his quiet and cold bearing soon returned.

Again he examined every corner, every crevice of the little room, then quitted the hut, and searched every bush and every nook. It was all in vain—the heavy rain had washed every trace between the river and the hut away, and the rising stream, which agitated some branches of a birch-tree, attracted his attention. Its leaves seemed to have been torn off violently; but the flood had already washed away any traces that might have existed at the foot of this tree, and the Indian returned to the hut without having attained the end he had in view.

He then set about preparing the funeral couch for his murdered wife. He spread his blanket, and laid out her stiff limbs. He brought water from the river, and washed her blood-stained face and hair; he placed his own blanket under her head, that she might rest well and softly, as in olden times, and tried to place her hands upon that heart which had beaten for him so faithfully and devotedly. Her right hand remained firmly clenched, and he was on the point of giving up the attempt to unclasp the fingers that had grown so stiff in death, when he perceived something in their grasp. Renewing his efforts, he at last took from the dead woman's grasp a horn button, of a dark colour, which she must have seized in the struggle. Yet Assowaum felt that even this would hardly lead to the detection of the

murderer. He shook his head sadly, and carefully placed the button in the pouch which he always carried at his side.

Once more he took his station at the feet of the beloved, as if she were but slumbering, and he was watching at her side.

Thus he sat, motionless, for many hours; the fire gradually declined, flashed up two or three times, and at last died out. Darkness reigned in the little room. The wolves in the wood had retreated—no sound broke the solemn stillness of the night, save the plashing and gurgling of the swollen stream. The owl avoided the awful place, and only from a distance could its screams be indistinctly heard. All was silent, and the dark form bent over the dead body until the fresh morning air shook the dew-drops from the bushes. A streak of light in the east proclaimed the approach of day, and the night birds, in loud and plaintive notes, took their leave of retreating darkness.

Voices were heard outside the hut, and, followed by Wilson, Brown stepped into the quiet room. The Indian did not seem to observe him; his eye, which he had not for a moment taken off Alapaha's face, dwelt painfully upon those dear features. At last his friend gently touched his shoulder, and Assowaum started up, as if awaking from a dream.

"Come, Assowaum," said Brown, kindly stretching out his hand to him, "be a man—master your grief, which threatens to consume you, and let us set to work. We will, in the first place, bury your wife, and then avenge her."

The Indian listened unmoved at these words, until the last fell upon his ear.

"Avenge her!" he exclaimed, leaping up with glowing eyes. "Yes! avenge her! come, brother, the sight of this body unmans me—come!"

Saying these words, he took the little tomahawk that had belonged to his wife, and put it in his belt. With a firm step he then helped the two men to carry the body down to the canoe. Wilson offered him refreshment, but he refused to take any; went to his usual place in the canoe, and steered it safely down the river to Harper's dwelling, about ten miles off. Rowed by the powerful arms of the two men, the light craft glided with the rapidity of lightning through the foaming flood.

CHAPTER XVII.

ALAPAHA'S FUNERAL.

HARPER'S log-house stood at about a hundred paces distant from the banks of the Fourche-la-Fave, beneath the shade of some young hickory and mulberry-trees. The land around the house had only been cultivated for a very short time, the two men being, as we before said, new-comers. Logs of wood and the trunks of trees lay scattered about in all directions. Some of the timber had been prepared for transport; the remainder was in a very rough state, being nothing more than trees, with their leaves and branches. The house itself seemed to be provided with many comforts, some of which were rare enough amongst farmers in general. A little window had been constructed, furnished with real window panes. A well had been sunk in spite of the proximity of the river, and a good supply of pure, wholesome drinking water thus obtained. Out-houses for various purposes had been constructed in a rude fashion, giving evidence of the intention of the owners to devote themselves to agricultural pursuits. Chickens, and even a flock of proud turkeys, assembled round the doorway, anxiously waiting for food; while two powerful horses, evidently of northern breed, stood at the empty trough, and kept poking it with their noses, as if disappointed at not finding the usual quantity of maize stalks in the accustomed place.

In the open space before the dwelling, the men who had assembled on the preceding evening at Mullins's had collected together, and Roberts, in particular, was struck at the quiet and awful solitude of the place. He jumped nimbly from his pony, pushed open the door of the house, stepped in, and found all his worst suspicions confirmed. On a hard, rough couch, with the blankets thrown off, in the height of fever, lay the generally so merry and cheerful old man. Everywhere he was greeted with a friendly smile and a warm shake of the hand; he was a universal favourite, yet he now lay alone and helpless, without one kind soul to give him a cup of water to cool his burning lips.

Roberts and Bahrens, with deep emotion, approached the sick man's couch, and seized his hands, but he did not recognise them. He raved madly about hunting expeditions and excursions on foot, of his brother, and of his nephew, who had killed his antagonist, and whom he imagined to be standing at his bed-side, covered with his blood.

At this moment Rowson, who had regained his self-possession and usual calmness, stepped into the low room, and went to the couch of the sufferer, who at his approach drew himself up, exclaiming—

"Away! away! Wash your hands! they are stained with blood. Wipe your knife; it might betray you. Ha! your bullet was well aimed. What a hole it has made—the wound will be difficult to heal—it has touched the brain."

Rowson turned pale, and with a shudder drew back, while Roberts, without taking his eyes off the sick man's face, said in an undertone—"He is dreaming of his nephew; he thinks him guilty, and fears for his life."

"Strange fancies!" whispered the preacher, who had perfectly recovered himself, and was bending over the invalid.

"Harper," he said, in a soothing tone of voice, placing his cold forefinger on the sufferer's burning forehead, "arouse yourself. Your friends are near you——"

Before he could finish the sentence, Harper started up with a cry of anguish, exclaiming—

"Water! water!—the fiend stretches out his claws to catch me—it was not I who killed him—no, that one—the other—no—yes—I saw it all—I saw it—take me—it was I who struck the blow"—his voice died into a whisper, and he fell back unconscious upon his couch.

"He is very ill," said Bahrens, with much feeling. "Remain at his side, and I will go and fetch a drink of water to quench his thirst. The animals, too, must be fed; I cannot bear to see them running about half-starved, with no one to look after them."

Without further ado, Bahrens set to work; and before the men could land with their mournful burden, he had, assisted by Roberts, bathed the sick man's temples with cold water, arranged his bed a little, got him a refreshing drink, attended to the animals, swept the house, and put things in order, so that the place began to look a little more com-

fortable. Meanwhile Rowson and Roberts sat at the sick man's side, giving him everything that he required, and he at last fell asleep, more from exhaustion than anything else.

Shortly afterwards the canoe arrived, and Brown and Wilson, followed by the Indian, bore the body up the bank, and laid it down near the mossy trunk of a lofty oak.

"Where are we to dig the grave?" asked Mullins, stepping up to Brown.

The Indian heard the question, caught hold of the man's hand, and led him to a spot about a hundred paces distant from Brown's dwelling. It was close to his own wigwam, constructed of broad pieces of bark, covered with untanned skins. It was an Indian tumulus, and these are found in great numbers in Arkansas.

On reaching the place, Assowaum said, "Let the flower of the prairies rest with the children of the Natchez. Hatred and discord lighted in olden times the hearts of the Lenni Lennapes against their red brethren of the South. The Great Spirit has punished them for this—let their ashes now rest peacefully together."

The men set to work at the spot indicated by the Indian, and soon made a hole deep enough for the purposes of interment. They then got the body ready to place it in a roughly-constructed coffin, which they had made the night before, and transported thither. The Indian would not, however, allow them to do this; he fetched out of his wigwam a number of well-tanned skins, threw them over the body of his wife, and then, assisted by Brown, whom Bahrens had requested to leave the room, that his uncle's short and refreshing repose might not be disturbed, he placed his young wife in her last quiet resting-place.

Mullins now came forward with a hammer and nails in his hand, in order to fasten down the lid of the coffin; but Assowaum again interfered, and tied round the coffin his leathern lasso (laço), and thus let it down into the grave.

Rowson then stepped to the open grave, and Assowaum made a sudden movement, as if about to prevent the performance of the Christian funeral ceremony; but he remembered how dear the creed had been to the deceased, and he offered no opposition to the proceedings, but buried his face in his hands. He then knelt down at the side of the grave,

and his long pent-up grief, manfully restrained until that moment, burst forth, and his breast heaved convulsively, while a flood of tears streamed down his quivering cheeks. Deeply in that sad hour did he feel that the being at whose body he had gazed for the last time, had left her tribe, her friends, and her home, and had become a wanderer amongst a strange people for his sake. The Methodist preacher, in low, nasal sounds, commenced his sermon over the body of the woman whom he himself had cruelly murdered. He praised her virtue and piety; he commended the zeal with which she had attached herself to the service of the true God, believing steadfastly in him. He praised her dutiful love for her husband and chief, and asked of Heaven, to which he dared not raise his guilty eyes, mercy for the deceased, and forgiveness for the culprit, who, perhaps in anger, had shed innocent blood.

He had not finished his sermon, ere the Indian seemed to be moved in a strange and most extraordinary manner. Taking his hands from his eyes, he cast a piercing glance at the preacher, and the latter was silent, and trembled violently at the darkly glowing scowl of the warrior. The Indian drew himself up proudly, took his wife's tomahawk in his right hand, and pointing with his left towards the Methodist, said in a loud and firm voice—

"Alapaha is dead—her spirit has gone to the blessed abodes of the white man—her heart turned away from the Great Spirit, whose vengeance has at length fallen upon her. Why, then, does the pale man now pray to his God to have mercy upon that woman who left and forgot everything to follow and obey him; who renounced the belief of her tribe, and prayed to the white God?"

Rowson made a motion, as if about to interrupt the Indian; but the stern glance of the latter again deterred him, and he continued—

"You also pray for forgiveness for her murderer. He has put his poisoned hand into the pure blood of the heart of the flower of the prairies. Which man here that knew her did not love her? No—no pardon! Curses upon the murderer! Assowaum will find him. He will live for nothing else; and when he has avenged this deed, the Great Spirit will receive him with open arms and a smiling face."

Rowson, who had only restrained himself by a great effort, now silently raised his hands, and said, after a long and seemingly reverential pause—

"May it please Heaven to pardon the unfortunate man who is overcome by his bitter grief, and thus goaded to utter words of hatred and anger."

This and much more the preacher said, whilst the men listened with reverential silence. Assowaum alone, with his right hand on his tomahawk, scowled upon Rowson until the coffin had been lowered by the men into the narrow grave. Then his pride gave way; again he sank upon his knees, covering his face with his hands, and ere he rose again the little mound showed that the last solemn office had been performed.

All was now over, and most of the farmers went back to their homes. Bahrens and Wilson remained with Brown in their friend's little dwelling, in order to attend upon him and nurse him as much as lay in their power. Before Rowson left, Brown stepped up to him, thanked him for his friendly assistance in committing to the earth the body of the unfortunate woman, in spite of his own indisposition, and offered him every accommodation his small place could afford in case he did not feel inclined to leave at once. Rowson declined his offer, stating that he had to make many preparations for his marriage. He went away with a blessing on his lips, and deep humility and piety in his looks; while the young man, absorbed in dark thoughts, gazed after him in utter abstraction. This was the man who had robbed him of all his earthly bliss, who stood like a dark shadow in the path of his existence. This was the man to whom his beloved was about to sacrifice both hand and heart. His she must be from that time forward until death should sever the ties made in the face of Heaven, and indissoluble during life.

"Farewell," he exclaimed, "farewell sweet dream of youth; farewell image of happiness; farewell aspirations that I nursed so tenderly; farewell pure affectionate being, and may Heaven pour blessings on your head! Forget the unfortunate being whom evil destiny has thrown into your way to undermine your peace;—farewell."

"Farewell," whispered Assowaum, who had stepped to his

side and caught the last word; "farewell! Yours is rather a strange farewell to a departed friend."

"A departed friend!" said Brown, startled.

"Were you not speaking of Alapaha?"

"I spoke of a departed one—you are right," said Brown, burying his face in his hands. "She is dead!—dead!—dead!"

"Dead!" cried Assowaum, in hollow tones; "murdered! but I must find out the murderer. The spirit-bird will in my dreams whisper his name into my ear. At her grave will I squat until I have heard his voice. Will my white brother assist me for the sake of the dead one? Will he aid his friend before he goes into another country to fight for the liberties of another people?"

Brown held out his hand to the Indian in silence. He then stepped to his sick uncle's bedside, while the Indian, mastering his grief, set about making, out of pieces of bark, a roof over the grave, in order to keep the rain from it. While he was thus occupied the sun gradually declined, and it was dark ere he had finished his sad task. With his tomahawk he endeavoured to make a small opening in the upper part, where the head of the corpse rested.

"Are you destroying what you have erected?" Brown asked, who had left the invalid to the care of his friends for a little while. His object in joining the Indian was to endeavour to induce him to take some refreshment, as he had tasted nothing for nearly four-and-twenty hours.

"I am not destroying it," said the Indian; "but the soul must have an outlet that it may go from and return to the body."

"The soul does not return, my poor friend," replied the young man, sadly; "it has gone up there where the blessed live; it will not revisit the earth."

"There are two souls," whispered the Indian; "there are two souls," he repeated more eagerly, seeing that his white friend nodded his head in disbelief. "Does not Assowaum's soul fly back in his dreams to the hunting-grounds of his tribe? Does it not behold the wigwam, at the entrance of which he played in childhood? Does it not see again his father, helping the feeble boy to string his bow? Yes,—it is far, far away in distant countries, and yet Assowaum lives, and lies on his couch and breathes. Could he breathe

if he had but one soul, and that absent in the land of his tribe, while he himself dwells near the dwellings of the white men on the '*roaring waters*?'* No; the Red man has two souls."

As night set in, Assowaum took the refreshment which Brown set before him, and placed it near the opening he had made at the head of his wife's grave. He lighted a small fire, which he kept very carefully burning while darkness overshadowed the slumbering earth, and sang, in a low, plaintive tone of voice, the monotonous and solemn dirge of his tribe.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ROBERTS MEETS WITH AN ADVENTURE IN A PANTHER HUNT—AN EXPEDITION UPON THE WATER.

Two weeks passed away after the events described in the preceding chapters, but all endeavours to find out the criminals proved fruitless. Brown's uncle had nearly recovered, and the favourable change in his state enabled the young man to devote much of his time to investigations into the foul act.

Several days had elapsed after the funeral before Assowaum could be prevailed upon to leave his wife's grave. He then suddenly disappeared, and Brown himself did not know in what direction he had bent his flight.

The settlers were, however, by no means discouraged by the failure of their efforts to discover the murderer, and only saw in that a still stronger proof of the necessity of uniting amongst themselves for the protection of their rights. This was another case in which the regularly constituted authorities achieved nothing, and the murderer seemed to remain, at least for the present, secure and undiscovered. Convinced of the necessity of organization and union, the greater number of the farmers had joined the Regulators, and a meeting, which promised to be very numerously attended, had been appointed for the next day, Saturday. They intended to deliberate upon what serious steps it would

* *Arkansas* in Indian.

be necessary to take in order to bring up all suspected persons in the neighbourhood who could not be charged with any particular crime. Possibly they might thus elicit something which would set them upon the track of the criminals. Moreover, the horse-stealing had caused a great sensation, and people felt pretty sure that those who had committed these depredations against their neighbours had also perpetrated the two foul murders recounted in these pages.

The warm sun shone on the green forest; an autumnal calm lay upon the face of Nature; not a breath of wind stirred; but deep, deep in the thicket where the Fourche-la-Fave overflows the reedlands, the chase was afoot, and the dogs awoke the woods with their loud baying.

"Hallo! hallo! dogs," cried Roberts, as he dashed upon his foaming horse across a large, swampy clearing. The excited animal leaped forward into a maze of thickly grown vines; the pack were on ahead, and the hunters followed one by one as fast as they could make their way through numerous obstacles, while each man kept encouraging the hounds with loud cries whenever he caught a glimpse of them.

"Huhpeeh!" cried Roberts, with his rifle in his left hand, and his heavy hunting-knife in his right, to cut through the creepers and vines. He cleared a large cypress-tree that had been felled at a bound, and, at the same time, with a well-aimed blow, cut a bramble asunder which threatened to arrest his progress. In endeavouring to remove this obstacle he had completely overlooked another, which, though it might not appear so formidable, was really a tougher one. It was a straggling vine, and before he could raise his arm for another stroke, or rein in his excited steed, the animal dashed on, and the next moment Roberts with his rifle and knife near him, lay at the side of the very trunk he had just before bounded over with so much nimble dexterity.

"A plague upon it!" he murmured, as, after several violent efforts, he had raised himself out of the mire into which he had fallen head-foremost. "Pony! here! kob, kob! pony! the deuce take the animal! I believe he has gone off to hunt upon his own account." He was not far wrong in the assertion, as the cunning animal, which Roberts had ridden on so many hunting excursions, took much too

lively an interest in the chase to think of waiting for its master, and thus to throw away the very best time. Like an arrow, having once got rid of its rider, it followed the pack, and in a few seconds was neither to be heard nor seen.

"The animal is off, indeed!" said the old man, angrily, after having looked about and listened attentively; "there is not the least trace to be seen or heard, and it seems that I have put my foot into it. The hunt appears to be yonder behind the hills; I should not wonder if it turned out that the panther had set off towards the Petite-Jeanne. He will try to get into the lower grounds, and seek refuge in the reedland on the other side of the river. Wait a little, my boy, perhaps I shall be in at the death in spite of my old bones. A little patience; I have been in worse positions."

Roberts's ideas were evidently returning to the war of independence, for he smiled good-humouredly, and having during this soliloquy wiped the mud off his rifle, primed it afresh, and put his knife in its sheath again, he proceeded in the direction of the river. Here a new difficulty presented itself to the unhorsed rider, and that was the necessity of crossing the stream. He wandered up and down in vain for some time, trying to find a shallow place. At last he observed the trunk of a tree, rotting close to the steep bank, where a bear seemingly had been at work, and had torn off several pieces. The marks of that animal's claws were visible, and had evidently been made since the last rain. This, however, could matter but little; the hounds were in full cry, and could not very easily be called off. In fact, it would have been almost impossible to put them upon another scent, even if Roberts had desired to do so, which was by no means the case.

Only a few days before a panther had attacked one of his colts, and the night after a large, full-grown horse had fallen a prey to another of these savage animals, which sprang out of a tree upon its victim, tore open the arteries of the neck, and thus destroyed the strong and powerful creature.

The old hunter knew that, although it was very probable that the panther would endeavour to reach its den, which it could only very recently have quitted, yet it would not swim across the river a second time, as these animals dislike water.

He was, therefore, very anxious to get as quickly as possible to the other side of the river. Moreover, the noise of the pack grew more distinct, as if the dogs were again approaching him, and consequently the hunt might at any moment turn in his direction Roberts rolled the decayed trunk towards the steep bank, pushed it over, and then descended, holding by reeds and roots. He placed his rifle upon the strange raft, and was about to attempt a passage across the stream, when the cries of the dogs sounded very near at hand in the direction of the river, and all at once broke out so boisterously, that Roberts could not but think that the panther had, in its fright, taken refuge in a tree, and thus for a time evaded its pursuers.

No time was to be lost. Pushing the log into the river, he had just reached the deep water, about midway, when the brushwood on the opposite shore rustled, the dry reeds gave way, and at the same instant a dark form appeared on the top of the bank, and rushed down with the quickness of lightning into the flood, which closed over it.

It was the panther; and it dived so near the hunter as to splash him all over. The eddies caused by this sudden plunge nearly upset his frail craft. The fierce animal came again to the surface; but without paying attention to its foe, swam to the opposite shore.

Roberts had by this time regained his presence of mind, which at the first moment had been somewhat shaken by the surprise. His rifle was luckily quite dry; he cocked it, and raising it to his shoulder, fired. His position was by no means a comfortable one to take an aim, but he hit the panther, then just emerging from the water. The animal sprang into the air, and fell back into the stream. Roberts was about to utter a shout of triumph, when the wounded animal again appeared out of the water, and ran up the steep bank. At this moment our navigator, having lost his balance, slipped into the river, disappearing beneath the surface, with rifle and powder-flask. Just as he rose again to the top of the stream, the dogs, which had been howling at having lost the trail, reached the spot where the panther had taken the water. In they dashed, and catching sight of Roberts struggling in the stream, supposed it to be their prey, and made towards the unfortunate hunter. Roberts's

position at that moment was not an enviable one, for if the dogs, which strove with all their might to reach their supposed enemy, had come up with him while struggling in deep water, they would have torn him to pieces before the error could have been perceived; as it was, he saw in good time his danger, and struck out, holding firmly his heavy rifle in his left hand. He had hardly reached a place where he could find firm footing ere the dogs surrounded him, and Poppy, not at once recognising his master, sprang at him. Roberts drew himself up quickly, drove back the foremost animals with the butt-end of his rifle, and shouted wildly to the terrified pack—

"Back, you blood-hounds!—you cursed animals! Lie down, Poppy. You wretch! do you mean to fly at your own master!"

Poppy had by this time recognised his master, and bounded upon him joyfully; Roberts, still very suspicious, stepped back a few paces, fell into a deeper hole, and again disappeared under water, just as Bahrens reached the river-side. The latter, thinking it was the panther, put his rifle to his shoulder, and got ready to fire. The dogs now protected the hunter from the bullet of his comrade. Not wishing to hit them, Bahrens paused a moment; this was enough, and to his great astonishment he recognised his friend, who, unconscious of the new danger, had again succeeded in getting firm ground under his feet, and began spitting out some of the water that he had swallowed. The pack had, however, got scent of the blood which flowed from the panther's wound, and, with a wild noise, darted off in pursuit, and soon after brought it to bay in the valley.

"Hallo, Roberts!" cried Bahrens, from the opposite bank. "What the deuce are you doing in the Fourche-la-Fave?"

"I believe I am looking for crayfish," he replied, scrambling out of the water, and trying to climb up the steep bank.

Twice did he fail in his attempts, and slip back to the stream, but at last he succeeded in scaling the bank. His friend could not conceal his merriment at the woful figure that he made, but stood holding his sides. Having scrambled so far, Roberts seized a young tree, swung himself up, and

disappeared in the thicket, without bestowing another glance upon Bahrens.

The latter returned to look for his horse, which, when he had heard the dogs in the water, he had left behind, that he might the more readily force his way through the various obstacles that impeded his progress. He mounted, and galloped away to the ford a little higher up. In spite of his hurry, he arrived too late at the scene of action, for, while trying to force a passage through the reedland, he heard the report of a rifle, and soon afterwards the cry of the dogs, evidently running round a tree. The panther was, however, still in his retreat, when he stepped into the little clearing where all the hunters had assembled. With its claws in the branch of the tree, the animal clung to its last protection with all its might. The convulsions that shook its whole frame showed how severely it had been wounded. Presently the claws relaxed, and it fell among the howling pack. It descended upon one of the young hounds, breaking its back. At first the men could not get the mutilated body of the dead panther from the dogs. They tore it with savage delight. At last, however, they were beaten off, and Cook, to whom the wounded dog belonged, and who saw that there was no chance of saving its life, with a bullet put an end to its sufferings.

"That is the seventh dog I have seen killed in that manner," said Bahrens, angrily, putting down his rifle. "The poor, stupid animals are not to be called off when such prey is before them. Ere they know where they are, these brutes spring amongst them, knocking them down right and left like nine-pins."

"A bear which I shot last year," said Roberts, shivering with cold, "killed two in exactly the same manner, and broke the leg of a third. I had to kill the poor creature."

"Hallo, Roberts," said Bahrens, laughing, "you do look comfortable; we had better light a fire. Cook, where do you come from? Bless me, I have not seen you for the last fortnight—not since you had that fruitless chase after the wrong horses. Did you kill the panther?"

"Yes," said Cook, wiping his rifle, and loading again. "I was over at Harper's, and hearing the dogs so near, I could not resist the temptation."

"We are near Harper's house, I suppose," said Roberts. "The country hereabouts seems familiar to me. I fancy it lies over there, behind those cypress-trees."

"Hardly five hundred paces from them," replied Cook. "We had better go to him at once; Mr. Roberts can dry his clothes there, and we can flay the animal."

"I wish I knew where my horse had got to," Roberts observed, rather anxiously. "Perhaps his bridle has caught somewhere. I made a knot in it, so that it does not hang down very low."

"Don't be afraid," said Bahrens. "There comes Mullins, leading the poor creature. Where did you find him, Mullins?"

"Just where the panther first crossed the river. He stood as if examining the place. I think he found the bank rather too steep for him," said Mullins, joining the group with the runaway. "But hallo!—he's a strong fellow. I do not wonder now at his having killed that horse."

It was indeed an extraordinary large panther that had given them so long a chase. Had not the animal been wounded by Roberts's shot, he would not, in all probability, have been so easily captured. The men now endeavoured to lift the inanimate form upon Cook's horse, which, in spite of Cook's repeated assertions as to his gentleness, proved very restive; and if he had already, as his master declared, carried two bears, he could not now be prevailed upon to allow the dead panther to be brought near him. In vain they rubbed his mouth with the wild beast's blood; he did not seem to mind that, it was the scent that annoyed him most. The men were at last obliged to flay the panther on the spot, and to content themselves with the skin, which, after some difficulty, they got upon the back of one of the horses. The animal did not seem to like his load, but kept tossing his head, and by leaping, starting, and plunging, endeavoured to get rid of the disagreeable load.

They soon reached Harper's dwelling, fastened their horses to the trees, and disappeared through the door.

CHAPTER XIX.

HARPER'S DWELLING—COOK'S ACCOUNT OF HIS ADVENTURE IN PURSUIT OF THE HORSE-STEALERS—HARPER'S AND BAHRENS'S WONDERFUL STORIES.

THE inside was not so cheerful and tidy as when Harper was in health and strength, and presided over the arrangements of the little bachelor-household, in which he had been occasionally assisted by Alapaha. During the last few days he had indeed recovered in a great measure from his illness; but the weakness which fever always leaves behind was still rendered apparent in all his movements. Even the generally jolly, healthy, ruddy face had assumed a very ashy hue, and the cheek-bones were painfully prominent.

His neighbours did not desert him in the time of need. Everybody liked him, and they watched at his bedside by turns, as long as there was any necessity for so doing; and when he was getting better, many spent days with him, trying to amuse him. Bahrens in particular had taken a great liking to him, and had become a frequent and ever welcome guest in his simple home.

When the party entered, Harper was resting on his bed. His once ruddy cheeks were pale and sunken; his vivacity had left him, and the effects of the fever were painfully evident. His eyes glowed at the sight of his visitors, and gleamed with delight as he bade his dear guests welcome in a most cordial manner. He stretched out his thin hand to them as they entered, and was more especially friendly to Roberts and Bahrens.

"Welcome, all of you; welcome, Roberts—you *are* a fine fellow. To the chase, then, I am indebted for this visit; but bless me, what is the matter? You really look as if you had just come out of the water. Here, Bill, give Roberts a change, or he will take his death from the effects of the wet."

"Thank you, thank you," Roberts replied, as the young man brought him a warm, dry suit, and prepared to assist him in changing his clothes. "Thank you—but Brown, I have a bone to pick with you. My good wife is very angry

with you, because you are never to be seen now ; ever since that affair with the panther, when you shot the animal—you remember, Marion was with you. You must have hit him pretty hard, for I hear that Cook's eldest boy found him two days afterwards—at least the skeleton and a part of the skin —for the buzzards had——"

Brown would have let him go on talking without attempting to interfere, but Cook took him by the arm, exclaiming—

"Hallo ; stop ! You are off again. Come, sit down near the fire ; and you, Harper, had better draw up, for though we have closed all the chinks and crevices there are plenty of draughts, and you might possibly catch cold again. The wind whistles through the chinks dreadfully."

"Have you such a thing as a basin here ?" asked Roberts. "In order to get out of the river, I had to climb up the muddy bank by the aid of my hands, and——"

"Cook, be kind enough to get down that iron bowl there —the one without a handle—you know which I mean."

"Of course I do," said the young farmer, taking down the utensil alluded to, and filling it with water from a bucket that stood before the door. "Of course I know all the arrangements of your household, and, perhaps, better than you do yourself—and it don't take one long to get acquainted with them."

"Have you no towel ?" cried Roberts, holding out his hands in a very helpless manner.

"I hope you have a pocket-handkerchief with you," said Cook.

"I have ; but all my things are wet through, and consequently are of no use just now."

"As that is the case, take this one," said Cook, giving him a towel.

"You must relate that hunting affair to me," cried Harper. "This is a remarkably fine panther skin ; will you hang it up outside, Cook ? Hang it upon the little maple-tree on the right, but high up : the deuced dogs got my last stag skin, and actually devoured it, the wretches !"

Roberts had to relate the whole adventure, while Cook hung the skin up outside, taking care to put it up in a place of security. The company had a great deal of trouble in

keeping Roberts to the point, and preventing him from getting astray in all kinds of curious wanderings and episodes.

"Now tell me, Roberts," said Cook, when the story was over, "how you managed when you were making love to your present wife. I really wonder how it is that she did not lose her patience altogether."

"A pretty fellow you are to ask such questions, Cook," said Roberts. "Why, this is the first time I have seen you since you undertook that notable expedition upon a wrong trail after the horse-stealers; how about that matter, eh?"

"Ah! he has not told us the particulars of that affair yet," cried Harper; "and he has had plenty of opportunities. I have seen him every day for a few hours."

"You have been ill," Cook replied, "and how could I bore you with that tiresome story? I will tell you all now. The affair was simple enough. We found that the tracks went across the river, and therefore followed them, thinking, of course, that they were the right ones, not having previously met with any others. As we were riding down to the river, Harfield declared, in my own hearing, that he would swear that they were those of his own horses. However, he must, after all, have been mistaken in that point. On gaining the opposite bank we did not search or examine long, but threw away our torches, and went as quickly as possible with our jaded horses in pursuit. During the night we stopped but once, to let our horses rest, and to take some refreshment ourselves. We heard that a man had passed with some horses, and that he was apparently much pressed for time. The farmer, of course, had only heard the clatter of the horses' hoofs, and knew nothing of colour, or general appearance. He assured us that we should catch them, if such was our wish, for they had passed about half an hour before we arrived. 'My poor horses!' exclaimed Harfield. 'How the scoundrel will tire them! Only let him look out for squalls when I catch him. This rope will serve his turn.' Harfield always carried the rope about him. 'He shall swing loftily, I vow,' he continued, and so on, growing more impatient as we got nearer to the object of pursuit. At break of day, just as we were going easily along down a short rise, we all at once perceived a man with the horses sitting quietly under

a tree. When he became aware of our approach, he did not make the least effort to get away. I looked at Harfield in amazement, but he kept staring at the horses, and at last cried, pulling up suddenly, 'Infernal deception! these are not my animals!' He was quite right; there were two white horses, which none of us knew, in addition to the animal which the man himself rode. He turned out to be that fellow Johnson, who has been skulking about the Fourche-la-Fave for some time, and who gets a living by the chase. Harfield was furious, and all the more so, as he told me afterwards, because he bore that good-for-nothing fellow a particular grudge. However, nothing could be done. We rode up to the horses; but Johnson gave us rather sharp answers; and in reply to our question as to what he meant to do with the animals, said he hoped he could do what he pleased with his own. Harfield gnashed his teeth with rage; and though I did what I could to put him in a good humour, yet he was too much excited to be easily pacified; and it was not long before he picked a quarrel with Johnson, who kept perfectly cool, always holding his right hand under his waistcoat, where, of course, he had his knife and pistols. Harfield swore the most dreadful oaths that he would Lynch him, if he ever found him upon his grounds; but Johnson only laughed, declaring that he should shortly have the pleasure of paying him a visit. At last, I succeeded in parting them. It was then too late to continue the search in any other direction, as the rain that had fallen during the night must have washed away every trace. We had, therefore, to give up the pursuit. Harfield was persuaded that the animals were still in the settlement, and we searched every nook and cranny of the lowlands, but in vain. The animals had disappeared; but how, is an enigma."

"And where they are gone not less so, I should think," suggested Bahrens.

"Hardly. I think they are in Texas. I must really go to Texas some day, to get a knowledge of the people there. I fear I should not find any old acquaintances amongst the inhabitants, though I might light upon a horse or two that I had known before."

"This occurred the very same evening that the poor Indian woman was murdered, did it not? Did you hear

nothing of that affair?" asked Roberts. "You must have passed close to the very spot."

"I believe, now that you speak of it, that one of our party did hear a cry. That was just as we came to the ford. It must have been the poor woman. The hut is not far from the road. Do you know what has become of the Indian, Brown?"

"No," he replied; "four days after his wife's funeral—during which time he kept up a small fire at her grave, taking care to leave food there—he disappeared from this part of the country; or, at any rate, he has not been seen near our place. I expect him back every day, for I know that he will not quit Arkansas until he has satisfied his vengeance. This he will never do, under any circumstances."

"But where can he have hid himself?"

"He will take care of himself; you need not be under any apprehension," said Bahrens; "he is creeping about, and making his researches, and who can tell how soon he will be among us again? I wager he will make some discoveries; you Regulators could not wish for a better assistant than this Indian."

"Is it true, Brown, that they have made you their leader, in Heathcott's place?" asked Roberts.

"Harfield and myself have been nominated to the post," replied the young man. "He acts at the Petite-Jeanne, and I at the Fourche-la-Fave. I shall, however, resign as soon as I have redeemed my oath. I only wish to bring the murderers of young Heathcott and the Indian woman to justice, and I shall be satisfied. I am told that Rowson preaches against the Regulators as being not only an illegal, but also an unchristian association."

"He left these parts a week ago," said Roberts, "and, as I hear, for the Mississippi—I believe Memphis—where he intends to make sundry purchases. He is to be back this very week. It is rather lucky for him, since Atkins wants to sell his land, which is by no means a bad lot, although rather too swampy."

"Does Atkins mean to sell? Why, I never heard anything about it. Has he found a purchaser?"

"Rowson seemed to like the land," said Roberts, "and of course I have nothing to say against his buying it. Marion

will be close to us; and if on a Sunday, when his new chapel has been built, on the road to the Left-hand-fork—the trees have been cut ever since Christmas, and I should——"

"Now then, gentlemen, draw your seats round the table, and take the best refreshment we have to offer," said Brown, interrupting Roberts.

"What say you to a piece of panther-flesh?" cried Roberts, laughing.

"Thank you, I had rather not," said Bahrens. "I tried that once, and it made me horribly ill."

"Where was that?" asked Harper, who was just putting a cup of tea to his mouth, but stopped, full of expectation.

"Where? why, out in the forest, to be sure; where else do you think such a thing could happen?" replied Bahrens. "It was at the Washita; we had been hunting all day, and returned late in the evening, without meeting with the least success."

"I suppose you had sprained your ankle on that occasion?" Roberts suggested, looking slyly at Harper.

"Oh, go to the deuce!" the other replied angrily, breaking off his tale. "When I reached the appointed encampment, my comrades were merry enough. They had lighted a fire, and on a bush close at hand hung a skin, which they declared was that of a young stag. The feet, the head, the tail, and one of the four legs were however wanting; and when I inquired about them, they said they had eaten the leg and fed the dogs with the rest. I soon cut a good slice off the animal, cooked it, and ate it all by myself, as the rascals pretended that they had satisfied their hunger before my arrival. Just as I was in the middle of my meal, up comes my dog, who, as hungry as myself, had been sniffing about everywhere. In his mouth he brought something, which he placed quite close to me—as much as to say, 'Look what they have shot.' Well, what do you think it was? Nothing less than the head of a young panther. The food I was eating stuck in my throat, and I looked round quite frightened at the grinning rascals behind me. They could no longer contain themselves, and burst out into fits of laughter. I got angry, and determined to make them believe that panther's flesh was a favourite dish of mine. I bolted the morsel that stuck in my throat. I cut another piece, and asked

them with the most innocent face imaginable why they had not at first told me that it was panther-flesh I was eating, as it would have been twice as palatable to me. I assured them that in Tennessee I had once lived for a month on nothing but such food, varying it on a Sunday by a wild cat. They opened their mouths wide with astonishment, and one of them—a young fellow only seventeen years old, who sat just opposite me—began to make the most horrible faces. I could not, however, force down the morsel I had still in my mouth; the more I tried, the worse it was. I did my best for a few moments; but at last I could stand it no longer, and was compelled to beat a quick retreat."

"Brown, this wild turkey is excellent; have you shot many this spring?"

"A few," said the young man, still laughing at the anecdote that had just been told. "They are fatter this year than usual."

"Did you ever eat rattlesnakes?" asked Mullins.

"No—I should think not," said Harper, whom the tea had somewhat enlivened, and who felt much better than he had done for some time.

"People do not eat the body," Mullins observed; "it is only the tail that is a delicacy."

"Is there no danger from the poison?" asked Bahrens, astonished.

"Not if you swallow it," said Brown. "Moreover, there is no poison in the flesh. It is only the smell that is rather disagreeable, and that is by no means unwholesome. I know a person who ate a good-sized piece of the *horned* species, without feeling the least inconvenience."

"Surely that is poisonous," cried Harper. "I once saw one of those *horned serpents* basking on a large oak. I was just going to shoot it, when it turned round, and, in its fury, seized one of the young branches which shoot out from the trunk in spring. It then kept quiet for a minute, and I shot its head off. The oak died that very month; the little branch into which it had inserted its fangs turned quite black, and even the creepers which grew near withered."

"That's nothing," said Bahrens, turning round to Harper. "You know what kind of a place Poinsett County is, more particularly for poisonous serpents. There can hardly be

more of them in the Mississippi swamps. Among them is found, though luckily not often, the 'horned serpent.' Two years ago, a German settled there with his family. He died soon after, and his family left because they could not stand the climate. When he first arrived, a relation, or an acquaintance, or some such kind of person, who was understood to do the rough work in the house, lived with him. All the week he was ill with a fever, and when on a Sunday he came out in full trim, people were astonished. He then wore a light yellow waistcoat, with red stripes, an amazingly large hat, short black trousers, fitting very tight, and a blue coat, reaching down——"

"But what have we to do with the man's coat?" said Harper, growing impatient.

"It is of greater importance than you think," said Bahrens, nodding his head significantly. He then continued, without allowing himself to be disconcerted—"reaching down to the ankles, with a very small collar, and a very large white linen pocket which always stood open, and in which the juvenile portion of the public used at times to throw peach-stones, pieces of water-melon, and similar things. Its brightest ornament was the large metal buttons."

"What do we care about the man's buttons?" cried Harper.

"Much, very much," said Bahrens, nodding in his significant way. "But listen. This young man was going one Sunday, with a large black-bound Bible under his arm, to a prayer-meeting, when he saw in his path what he took to be one of the little green parroquets, or parrots, which he fancied to have just fallen from its perch. He stooped to pick it up, but unfortunately did not perceive a 'horned serpent,' which now darted forth from under the leaves, where it had hidden itself, and seized the unfortunate man just below the elbow. Of course, in a few minutes he was dead, and his relation, who was following with his wife, found him in the path. He ran with all speed to get help, but it was too late. They made a bier, carried him home, took off his coat, and found the little mark of the sting, which had turned quite black. The poor fellow was buried the very same evening—for it was very hot weather—in a roughly-made coffin, and the blue coat remained hanging on a nail behind the door."

"Well, what became of this serpent-bitten coat?"

"You shall hear. When the Germans got up the next morning, the sleeve through which the poison had passed was covered with stripes; towards noon they turned blue. In the afternoon the buttons came off, falling one by one to the ground. The pockets and the lining swelled, and towards evening the hook fell down, and began to smell."

"But, Bahrens——" exclaimed Harper.

"It began to smell, I repeat. They had to carry it out, and bury it," continued Bahrens, obstinately.

"Well, this is rather too much," said Harper, putting down the cup, and springing up. "The coat, you mean to say——"

"Had been poisoned," rejoined the old hunter, with perfect composure, taking a piece of tobacco from his pocket, and cutting off a large piece, which he put into his mouth.

"Boys, we really must think of going home," said Roberts, when the laughter and merriment caused by the anecdote had somewhat subsided.

Bahrens, indignant at the incredulity of the company, remained in a sitting posture on the trunk, which served him instead of a chair, and kept drumming with his fingers upon the wooden tray before him.

"At any rate I must go," said Roberts, seeing that Mullins alone seemed disposed to accompany him; "I, at least, must get home, or my good wife will be sure to grumble. Rowson was to come to-night in order to settle several things about this marriage. You would not oblige me by riding with me, Brown? Some things must be set down in writing; and though in my youth I had five writing lessons every week, for which the master——"

"I really am sorry that I cannot comply with your request, my dear Mr. Roberts," said Brown, somewhat embarrassed; "the Regulators from the Fourche-la-Fave mean to assemble to-morrow at Barill's."

"I thought the meetings were to be held at Smith's."

"Mr. Rowson has talked him over; and he at last believes that the society is sinful, and so he has left us," said Brown, smiling. "It does not matter much, for Barill lives at a place which is much about the same distance from all our

homes. He is a zealous and an ardent supporter of our cause."

"You have not, as yet, obtained any clue to Heathcott's murderers?"

"Not that I know of. At first, suspicion rested solely upon me. I was to have been arrested a few days after Alapaha's murder; but this was not done because proofs were wanting. Moreover, I was able to prove by Hoswell, who had accompanied me that morning some part of my journey, that I had not worn boots, but mocassins; though I had, indeed, in my possession, and even in my saddle-bags, boots just about the size of the prints. When I brought forward this in evidence all suspicion ceased; for the only pair of boots of that description among all the inhabitants of the neighbourhood is worn by Mr. Rowson, and nobody surely would like to accuse him."

Roberts looked up with surprise. "Ay," he said, "the murdered man would have dared as much; he could never endure the preacher."

"Unfortunately," continued Brown, "there has been rain nearly every morning this spring, and so the traces were nearly all washed out. Nobody could tell to whom the small knife found near the body belonged."

"Was it a penknife?" said Roberts.

"We have not, however, given up all hope; and we have been active enough, whilst we may have appeared to have been doing nothing. I can only say that suspicions have fallen upon people whom I, at least, should never have supposed guilty of such crimes."

"What has become of the man whom you found with those strange horses?"

"Johnson?" said Cook; "somebody is said to have seen him here again; but whether he is staying here, or has only passed through, I cannot say."

"Harkee, Brown; you will, at least, do me a favour by riding up to the settlement," said Roberts; "when shall you go?"

"In about half an hour. I thought of spending the night at Wilson's."

"Very well; then you will pass Atkins's to-morrow

morning, and I should be glad if you would ask him to stay at home on Monday next; as, in that case, I will ride over with Rowson, and have a look at his farm. May I rely upon your doing this?"

Brown promised not to forget.

Roberts put on his own clothes, which were now thoroughly dried and aired; and rode off on his way home, accompanied by Mullins.

CHAPTER XX.

ROWSON AND ROBERTS—THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT—ASSOWAUM REAPPEARS.

Nearly three weeks had elapsed since the eventful evening on which Brown had taken leave of Marion. He had then vowed never to see her again, and he had kept his promise truly and firmly. Much had he suffered in the interval; often had he struggled with his feelings, and none but himself knew what he had endured. His face had grown pale, his eyes had lost their former lustre and vivacity. Nothing could have induced him to remain longer in a country in which the only woman he had ever loved was so soon to be sacrificed to another. Yet he was anxious before taking his departure to clear himself in the eyes of the world from all suspicion. Marion, he knew, did not think him capable of committing the crime by some laid to his charge; of that he was convinced; but he wished his acquaintances in Arkansas to know the truth. They imagined that he had killed Heathcott in fair fight, and believed him to have been fully justified in doing so by the circumstances of the case. So completely had the opinion that he was the perpetrator got abroad, that his companions only shrugged their shoulders and regarded it as a matter of course.

Brown was firmly resolved that the murderer should be discovered and punished, and that the Indian woman should be avenged, and then he could leave a country which must henceforth be to him a scene of grief and pain.

What were Marion's feelings at this strange juncture of affairs? What did she think of the young man who loved her so tenderly? Woman's heart is strong, and will endure

much suffering before it breaks. Marion felt that she was only doing her duty; and this thought gave her consolation. Rowson had obtained her promise, although when she gave it she had not seen the young stranger whose appearance was to cause such a strange revolution in her mind. She had, however, pledged her word, and that was enough; she must keep it. She even thought that it would be cruel to break the heart of one man—and that one her intended—in order to render another happy. Had not Rowson, in those soft phrases which he seemed to have ever at command, told her, only a short time before, that in her all his earthly bliss was centred; that her face was to him what air and sunshine are to the plant; and that he must sink into despair were she to turn away from him?

But for all this the poor girl often bedewed her pillow with copious floods of tears. No one noticed her sufferings. In prayer she looked for and found comfort and relief, and the morning found her strong and composed. Rowson had passed the night at their house, and on the morrow Marion told her mother—not with tears and sobs, but with a firm voice—that she was ready to marry the man chosen for her by her parents. Her mother embraced her with delight; her father kissed her forehead, saying, "Take him, if you think he can make you happy. May you never repent your choice."

Rowson again absented himself on a short excursion to Memphis, but was expected back almost hourly.

It was Friday—exactly a fortnight after that dreadful evening when the poor Indian woman fell a victim to her cowardly assailant. The sun stood high in the heavens and shone brightly on the forest, of which the finest trees were destined so soon to fall before the axe of the settler. In and about Roberts's farmhouse there was activity and much bustle. The farmer's pretty daughter, with a little basket on her arm, stood surrounded by noisy fluttering flocks of hens, ducks, and geese; while she scattered in the neat and well-kept farmyard the meal for which they seemed so impatient. Outside the fence a number of pigs were running up and down—in vain endeavouring to find an entrance—anxious to share in the liberal distribution going on within. The farmer's wife sat at the door, gazing contentedly at the

animated scene, when Marion of a sudden uttered a low cry, and let the empty basket she was bringing back into the house fall out of her hand. At the fence stood Rowson, waving his hand in a friendly manner, and smiling blandly. He had finished his business, and had come to fetch his bride.

"What is the matter with you?" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, feeling a little frightened. On turning round, she caught sight of the man whom she had anxiously expected, and said, stretching out her hand to him, "Well, I am glad you have returned, Mr. Rowson. That is right. You have come back at last. We have been looking out for you most anxiously."

"And has Marion also thought of me?" asked the preacher, smiling, stepping over the fence, and taking the hand of the blushing girl, on whose brow he imprinted a kiss.

"I am very glad to see you once more in good health and spirits," whispered the young woman. "You know that you are always welcome here."

"To the house, I know I am, but am I welcome to your heart, Marion?" asked Rowson.

The girl trembled, but did not reply.

"Marion," continued the preacher, after a short pause, "the blessing of Heaven has attended my present undertaking. I am now well enough off to have a comfortable home of my own. Marion, will you share it? Will you become my wife on Sunday next?"

"Yes," said her mother, in tender accents, as she drew her trembling daughter to her bosom. Marion was incapable of uttering the word "yes." Her mother said, "She has already confessed to me that she likes you, and the rest will follow. I am sure you will make her happy."

"As much as is in my power, or can be in the power of a poor sinful creature," said the Methodist, raising his eyes meekly to heaven, "I shall do. I believe that Marion is convinced of the fact; at least, I hope such to be the case."

The beautiful girl held out her hand to him in silence. He again pressed it to his lips, and she fell back sobbing on her mother's breast.

"Hallo! Rowson," said old Roberts, appearing at this moment over the fence; "you are as good as your word. How is business going on?"

"Excellently, Mr. Roberts," replied the Methodist, joyfully. "Even better than I expected; and I have now come to ask your blessing upon our union, which is to take place on Sunday next."

"Will not that be rather too soon for the girl?" asked Roberts, giving the reins to a negro boy, and approaching the family group.

"She is agreeable to the course determined upon," said her mother, "and we do not require grand preparations. But have you found a convenient residence, Mr. Rowson?"

"I was about to ask you both to come and look it over to-morrow," said the preacher; "that is to say, if you can spare the time. I believe I shall come to an agreement with Atkins this week respecting an offer I have made for his place, and then we shall have plenty of land."

"Would it not in that case be better," observed Roberts, "to postpone the wedding until all these arrangements are concluded, and thus save the trouble of moving once or twice? I should like it better, for the girl's sake, too. It would be more comfortable for her to go at once into a farm, instead of a mere log-hut."

"No doubt it would be more comfortable," Rowson replied; "but it is not yet quite certain when Atkins will be leaving. He may be four or even eight weeks before he goes; and, my dear Mr. Roberts, you will see it is natural enough that, after having overcome so many obstacles that stood in the way, I am anxious to call Marion mine."

"Well, be it so, in Heaven's name," said the old man. "Take her, and be happy."

"Thanks!—the most unfeigned thanks!" exclaimed Rowson, shaking him by the hand. "Marion shall never repent having confided her future welfare to me; but now farewell, dear parents—allow me to call you so, and soon——"

"Surely you will spend the evening with us!" said Mrs. Roberts. "You have been away so long, it is hardly fair to quit your intended again directly."

"Time is short, my good Mrs. Roberts," said Rowson, with a sigh, "and in our settlement, where people live so far apart, a day goes uncommonly quickly, even if one has but a few calls to make. To-morrow evening I hope to have completed all my arrangements, and to be able to spend the

remaining hours before the happy day in your society and in that of my intended."

"Very good, very good, Mr. Rowson," said the old man; "that's as it ought to be. You have now been absent from home for a week, and it is natural that you should have many things to set to rights. To-morrow evening we shall meet again. Do not forget that it is a settled matter that we are all to go to Atkins's together on Monday."

"Of course," replied the Methodist.

"I asked Brown this very evening to leave word at Atkins's, on his way to the meeting of the Regulators which is to be held at Barill's."

"I have been told the association of the Regulators is dissolved," said Rowson, with a little more eagerness than was consistent with his usually quiet and composed behaviour. "I heard it stated on my way here, as a fact."

"Nothing of the kind. They will, on the contrary, carry on their operations on a much larger scale. I believe they have reason to suspect several persons in the neighbourhood, and they will to-morrow consult what is to be done in times like these, so very dangerous——"

"Would they not admit one to their meetings?" asked Rowson.

"Certainly they would," answered Roberts, with a laugh, "but you must become a Regulator yourself, and I believe you are very much opposed to their proceedings."

"It is necessary that the Regulators should be joined by somebody," replied Rowson, "who would seek to restrain their zeal, and keep them from the commission of such excesses as have been committed in White County. In that sense, I should not think it incompatible with my position to join them."

Roberts looked narrowly into Rowson's face; and the latter, with some hesitation, continued—

"You imagine that I have changed my opinion in a very short time; such is not, however, the case. I still think the meetings of the Regulators wrong, because they are illegal."

"But—" said Roberts, when the other suddenly paused.

"Well, have you not heard the reason?" Mrs. Roberts said, somewhat angrily. "Good Mr. Rowson is quite right; these young people do things wildly and imprudently. I do

not mean to say that their intentions are bad—they think they are doing what is proper, although they sometimes commit the greatest and most crying injustice, and were I in the place of Mr. Roberts——"

"Nobody is admitted as a member of their association," said Roberts, still fixing his glance upon the preacher, who could not help seeking to evade his searching looks; nobody is admitted as a member of their league who will not promise to take an *active* part in their proceedings. I do not believe that, though they might possibly require an adviser, they will submit to have one amongst them."

"At any rate, the experiment can be tried," replied Rowson, who had by this time regained all his presence of mind. "I shall be there to-morrow if I can manage it, and shall only quit on being expressly ordered to do so. I shall then have done what I consider to be my duty, and nobody can be expected to do more."

"Very well," said Roberts, shaking him by the hand; "bravely spoken; I am glad to see a man remain faithful to his principles."

"Who is their leader now?"

"Brown; at least as far as the Fourche-la-Fave is concerned."

"He at least has *not* remained true to his principles," replied the preacher, looking at Roberts; "I still remember the words he uttered on this very spot against that association."

"Things have changed since then," replied the old farmer, seriously. "Brown was almost obliged to take an active part in this society, as his own good name was implicated. He had been formally accused as a murderer, and his sole aim now is to discover the real culprit. He had had a quarrel with Heathcott, and you know Heathcott was somewhat——"

"I thought the chief aim of the Regulators had been the discovery of the horse-stealers," said Rowson, growing rather pale.

"It is, partly; but if you are present at to-morrow" meeting you will hear all about it. I believe their object now is to get hold of some persons concerning whom suspicions are entertained. This would bring on a trial and then the guilty parties may be discovered."

"If they could only discover the murderer of the poor Indian woman," said Mrs. Roberts. "Oh, Mr. Rowson, you cannot believe how I have prayed for that. The woman was pious and good, and had such reverence for you. Oh, how often have I seen her weep during your sermons, as if her heart was going to break; and to die so young and in such a manner."

"Yes, it is fearful," said Rowson, deeply moved, though from different motives from what his auditors imagined. "My friends, I really must away, so good-night. Good-night, Marion! Where has the girl gone to?"

"Marion, my child, come here, do!" cried her mother; "Mr. Rowson is going, and wishes to bid you good——"

"Let her go, my dear friend," said the Methodist; "her heart is full, and she is communing with Heaven; to-morrow I hope to find her quite well and in good spirits."

Saying this he waved his hand, mounted his horse, and trotted along into the dark forest.

"Mother, what is the matter with the girl?" asked Roberts, after the preacher had withdrawn; "she behaves very strangely; I hope she has not been forced to marry that man?"

"Foolish man, *who* would force her?" said the matron, smiling. "She is still half a child, and is anxious and strangely excited at such an event. She probably feels a pang at leaving her parents. Well, at the side of such a man——"

"All right," said Roberts, taking off his spur, and hanging it up with his saddle and bridle under a little shed before the house; "all right, you have told me that so often."

"You do not seem to be particularly partial to the pious man."

"I am not, nor do I see why our child is to be so much more happy with him than with any other brave young fellow, who would be more of a *man*. Another husband might have been more welcome to me. However, since you women agree about it, I have nothing more to say but to give my consent. He seems anxious to make a start, and an industrious man will not be lost in Arkansas."

Rowson's apparently frank conduct had rather won upon the old man. He did not suspect evil in others; and why should he have done so in the case of one who throughout

the settlement was regarded as a pious man? Sometimes a passing suspicion, of which he could not give a very clear account, would cross his mind.

What, however, were the feelings of the preacher, as he trotted along through the shady forest? When he had gone some distance from the house, so that he could no longer be observed by its occupants, he dismounted, led his horse by the bridle, and walked, apparently lost in serious thought, along the small track which led through the wood. At last he halted, and said in low murmurs to himself—

"Arkansas is getting rather too hot for me after all. The devil may lose his game, and some chance or other—there are wonderful instances of the kind on record—bring to light things that might not by any means improve my good name in this neighbourhood. I must away as quickly as possible. Atkins may sell his farm as he can; I will not chain myself here, to be given up as a prey to pursuers when all the rest are out of harm's way. No; it is true that the Indian has disappeared, and without his aid it might be difficult to trace anything. I do not even know whether it will be possible even with his assistance. My penknife——"

The horse pricked his ears, and the Indian stood before him.

"Good evening, Mr. Rowson," he said, in a low tone, as he stepped from the thicket, and was about to pass him with a salute.

"Assowaum!" cried Rowson, his face turning very pale, "Assowaum, where—where have you hid yourself so long? We missed you from the settlement."

"Why, the pale man has been absent, too," replied the Indian, smiling, looking steadfastly at the preacher. "Assowaum returns to the grave of his wife."

"And have you discovered no clue to the murderer?"

"No," said the savage, in a scarcely audible voice, "not yet. The Great Spirit has prevented the sacred bird from whispering the name of the traitor into my ear. Assowaum has spoken to the Great Spirit of his people in a place which no white man's foot has desecrated. He will now wait for the voice of his Manitou."

"May it be favourable to you," said the preacher, entirely forgetting the disgust he had always shown at the religious

notions of the Indian. The latter saluted and proceeded on his journey, and the Methodist jumped into his saddle. When a curve in the road hid him from the Red-man he gave his pony the rein, and went so fast, that his long brown hair waved in the evening breeze, and the animal, unused to such a rapid pace, foamed and snorted as it bore its impatient rider through the lower grounds of the valley.

CHAPTER XXI.

WILSON'S CONFESSION—THE BEAUTIFUL WASHERWOMAN—AN ARKANSIAN CRADLE—THE RETREAT.

ROBERTS had not long left Harper's cottage, when Brown got ready to ride up to the settlement where Barill lived, at whose house the meeting of the Regulators was to be held on the morrow. Cook accompanied him some part of the way, and then turned to the left, intending to spend the night at home, and to follow at break of day. Bahrens promised to remain with the invalid, who in his turn declared that it was the last day that he would suffer himself to be mewed up in the house.

"I must have the greensward under my feet again," he exclaimed; "must see the fair, leafy roof above me again, or I shall never get well."

They agreed that he should ride with them on the next day to Bahrens's house, and spend a week there. As the journey might be too much for him to accomplish in one day, they arranged to pass the first night at Roberts's house, who had before invited them.

Brown trotted on his fiery little pony along the small path, hardly distinguishable among the leaves. In about an hour and a half he reached Wilson's little farm, whom he found getting ready to mount his horse.

"Hallo, Wilson! where are you going? Are you also bound for the meeting of the Regulators?" Brown shouted to him.

"Yes," replied the young man, but blushed violently at this simple answer.

"What are you doing, Wilson?" said Brown, laughing, when he observed him tightening the saddle-girths unnecessarily. "Why, you will kill the poor animal if you buckle him in as if you were going to ride a race. What is the matter with you, man?"

"Oh, nothing," muttered the other. "Which way are you bound?"

"I was coming to pay you a visit; and where are you off to?"

"I—I was going to Atkins's."

"Well, in that case, I shall come to you another time, and go with you to Atkins's; I have a message to leave there for Roberts."

Wilson was about to make some objections. Brown did not listen to them, but called to his friend to mount quickly, and then put his horse's head in the desired direction.

Wilson was soon at his side, and at last said, probably in order to break the silence, "You have some message from Roberts for Rowson? They say he is going to buy Atkins's farm; that is, if Atkins really does go away."

"Why, is that not settled?"

"Who knows? The old fellow is dark and silent as the grave; and, besides, I am the very last person in whom he would confide."

"Why should he not confide in you as well as in anybody else?" asked Brown, with a smile.

Wilson rather unexpectedly began to whistle a tune, and to beat the dust out of his leggings with a switch which he had broken from a bush. As he did not offer to reply to the question for some time, Brown repeated it. Thereupon Wilson reined in his horse, held out his hand to the young man, who also pulled up his animal, and said, in a confiding tone—

"You shall hear the whole of my story, Brown. It will be told in a few words, and—you are well-disposed towards me—perhaps you can give me some advice."

"Well, let me hear what it is," replied his friend. "Perhaps I can, perhaps I cannot—it is not often that I am asked for advice, especially in——"

"Affairs of love," he added, smiling at Brown, as he saw the blood rushing into his cheeks and temples. "Yes, you

are right," he whispered at last; "it is an affair of love, but not of love requited. Are you acquainted with Atkins's household?"

"I have never been there."

"He has a child, an orphan whom he adopted, a girl. Ah, you would laugh at me were I to speak as I feel about her. Yes, I know, though you may not show it to me out of kindness, yet inwardly you must laugh at me. Well, I will not give you a description of her person. I had been in love with the girl for a year, when she came with Atkins to the Fourche-la-Fave; and her father will not give her to me. It is true he is but her foster-father, after all. He has educated her, and made a fine girl of her; no thanks, however, to his wife for this. Now he is about to give her to a husband she does not like, and one she shall not have on any condition whatever. He worries her dreadfully about it."

"That is bad, indeed," said Brown. "How old is she?"

"Old? why she is only just seventeen years of age," said Wilson, with a sigh; "if she were one-and-twenty we need not ask the old man at all."

"Does she really love you?"

"She has told me so more than a thousand times."

"Well, then I should like to see where the great evil is? the heart of the parents will be melted somehow or other," said Brown, in a consoling manner.

"Yes, if there were time for it," exclaimed Wilson, impatiently; "Rowson's wedding is to take place to-morrow, and then Ellen is to go to them to help the young couple into their house."

"To-morrow?" said Brown, turning pale.

"Yes, to-morrow afternoon," continued Wilson, unconscious of the intense interest with which his companion listened to this new turn in his conversation. "Yes, to-morrow afternoon," he repeated; "and when Atkins has sold out he is going to Texas, and the girl must accompany him."

"Then you can go with him," said Brown, who hardly heard what the other said.

"That wont do," replied Wilson; "my old mother is still in Tennessee, not far from Memphis, and I must have her

near me. She is now living with strange people, and I wont leave her to die amongst them."

"Then I think I cannot do much for you," said Brown, abstractedly. "I do not know Atkins; that is to say, I have only seen him once; and it is, therefore, highly improbable that he would attach the slightest weight to anything I might say in favour of your suit."

"You need not try with Atkins at all, but with some one quite different."

"Who may that be, then?"

"With Mrs. Rowson. You know Rowson well, and Marion thinks a great deal of you, that much I know. If you will induce her to intercede for me, she is sure to do it."

"Mrs. Rowson!" said Brown, lost in thought. "Mrs. Rowson! can she do anything?"

"Oh, the Atkinses think a great deal of her; when Atkins's wife was so long ill last summer, Marion watched by her bedside for weeks together, with Ellen; they will do anything to please her, she is such a good girl!"

"Yes—yes, so she is," said Brown, with a deep sigh.

"Don't you think so?"

"What?"

"That they will do almost anything to please her?"

"My dear Wilson," said Brown, turning from his companion, "you might certainly have applied to some one better able to aid you in this affair than I am; Rowson himself, I believe, would be the proper person to take the matter in hand."

"Yes," said Wilson, almost angrily, "I know that; but I cannot bear that man. All the neighbours seem to like him. The womenkind have, at any rate, gone mad about him. As for myself, I do not know how it is, but I always feel very uncomfortable in his presence. His affairs, too, are of a strange description, and puzzle me. A year ago he came here, as he told us himself, poor; he never seems to do any work, he only preaches, for which he does not get a cent from anybody; yet he always has money. He has lived in this country for twelve months, he is going to marry the prettiest girl on the Fourche-la-Fave—except Ellen, for I consider her the best-looking. I have nothing to say against Rowson, and cannot have any charge to bring against him, only that he

is a coward—that is not my business; but I should not like to ask him to oblige me, though my life were at stake."

"Be patient, Wilson," said Brown, in a consoling manner. "If the girl really loves you, and the other man has not obtained her promise, everything may be arranged. You have many friends here, are young and industrious; what more do you want?"

"I want the girl, Brown," said Wilson; "and though you speak so finely—you will excuse my observation—you look exactly as if you were consumed by some secret grief which you will not confide to anybody. However, I cannot stand this any longer, and before Atkins goes away, my fate must be decided. If nobody will or can assist me to get the girl by fair means, why the deuce take me if I do not elope with her. I am quite sure that she will not refuse to go with me."

"Have you already asked Atkins for her hand?"

"Yes, and his wife—a bad woman—threatened to have me turned out of the house if ever I showed my face there again."

"Yet you *are* going there?"

"No doubt, but not *into* the house," said Wilson, laughing; "I am not quite so stupid as that. Ellen is washing to-day near the brook, a few hundred paces from the house. This is almost the only chance I have of holding a few minutes' chat with her. I mean to make the best of my time, and when she has finished her work, I shall ride over to Barill's. The weather is warm and fine."

"Cannot I get a sight of your fair one, that I may at least know what kind of taste you have?"

"Why not?" replied Wilson, cheerfully. "You will be pleased with her, and I need not be ashamed for her to be seen. We are not very far now from the place of meeting, and must strike to the left, otherwise they will perceive us from the house. Stop; leave your pony here, for we cannot ride through the slough, and as for a bridge there is nothing but an old cypress-tree put across. I shall take my pony down into the reed-thicket that is his usual resting-place."

Having fastened his horse, he led his friend across the small bridge.

"There she is!" he exclaimed. "But keep quiet, we will try to take her by surprise."

The two men cautiously approached a small clearing, just where the brook made a curve down towards the Fourche-la-Fave. They both stood still a few moments as if astonished at the spectacle which met their sight. Wilson cast a kind of triumphant glance at his friend, as much as to say, "You see that I was right. Is this a creature for Texas, and am I to have this sweet flower taken away from me?"

Close to the brook, from two wooden poles, hung a large black kettle. Several young women stood around in a half-circle, busily engaged at their washing. In front of a board, fixed like a table, stood Ellen, Wilson's fair beloved, and she, like the rest, was quite engrossed in her work. She accompanied herself at these labours with sweet snatches of song. This was not, however, her only occupation. Close beside her, fixed between two slender hickory-trees, hung, balanced by the light south wind, a little hammock, made of papao bark, in which had hitherto slumbered a healthy-looking rosy child. It suddenly raised its large dark eyes, looked up, and instead of smiling on the magnificent scene, contracted its little features to such a dreadfully cross look that all the signs of a coming storm and of a cry of help appeared. Ellen marked the little sleeper, and seeing that he was awake, she let her washing rod fall down, rocked the hammock, and began to sing a lullaby to the child, which seemed to be soothed by her presence as well as by her soft and melodious voice. The men listened in silence, and Ellen, unconscious of their presence, sang merrily, occasionally stooping down to the smiling child as if she was going to kiss him, then retreating from him in a playful manner.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed, frightened, when Wilson, at the end of her song, stepped up to her, and placed his hand round her waist. "Oh, you bad man, how *can* you frighten one so?"

"Do not be angry with me, my dear girl," whispered Wilson, as he pressed a kiss upon her lips. "But look here, I have brought a friend."

Ellen turned round sharply, half-frightened; and as her glance met that of the smiling young farmer, who must certainly have seen the kiss, her throat and face turned crimson, and she made a movement as if about to run

away. Wilson seized her by the hand, saying in entreating tones—

"Ellen, he is a true friend to me, and knows that we love one another; besides," he continued, wickedly, "you cannot on any account run away, and leave your charge. As the little rogue in the hammock seems to think he is very comfortable there, you had better remain. Am I right or wrong?"

"Wrong!" whispered the beautiful girl, smiling, her face being still covered with a crimson glow; however, she bowed to the stranger; "wrong, you know you must always be wrong."

"A fine law," said Wilson, turning to Brown. "Those made by the Regulators are nothing compared with that."

"Those rash Regulators," said Ellen.

"Stop," said Wilson, interrupting her, "don't be too liberal with your criticisms—here are two of them."

"You have become a——"

"Stop a little, here is our leader, and I——"

"Oh, you are no Regulator, are you?" said the pretty girl to Brown. "I cannot believe that you are."

"Have you such a dreadful aversion to those men?" asked Brown, smiling.

"Yes—oh yes; ma and pa told me such dreadful things about them—how they take innocent men in the night from their beds, for no other cause but that one of their company bears a grudge against them, and how they lash them to a tree, and flog them to death. Father has sworn to shoot any one of them who dares to come with unfriendly designs across his threshold."

"They are not quite so bad as your father believes," observed Brown; "and though——"

"Now I really wish to be allowed to speak a word too," exclaimed Wilson, stepping between them; "I really have not come to listen to a debate about the Regulators. Ellen, have you spoken to your mother once more?"

"Yes," answered the poor girl, shaking her head; "but she said——"

"You need not be afraid to speak out on account of Mr. Brown, he knows everything," said Wilson, observing that his intended cast a shy glance at the stranger.

"Alas! it will be of no use, either, to be silent," said the poor girl, with a sigh; "all Arkansas will soon know that I am about to be married to that rough man, Cotton——"

"Cotton?" asked Brown, with astonishment.

"Alas! yes; it is too true. Mother has forbidden me to mention that name to anybody; but why should I conceal her plans? I will die sooner than marry that man."

"You are not going to marry him," said Wilson, doggedly. "I will—but stop, I must not say that," he continued, as his sweetheart cast rather a reproachful glance at him; "but I know what I shall do, if we only discover the band of robbers who are in our immediate neighbourhood; and if Atkins will not then yield, I shall—I do not know what I am to do, but I believe I shall do something very wicked—I shall run away with you."

"And that's what you call a very wicked thing; that's very gallant of you, indeed," said Ellen, smiling and threatening him with her finger.

"You know that I mean what I say," Wilson rejoined; "but what is the matter with you, Brown? Why do you stare at the top of the tree?"

"Have you lately seen the man you call Cotton?" Brown asked the young girl, not paying attention to Wilson's observation.

"Yes," she replied; "about four days ago he returned from the Mississippi; I believe he went there two weeks before; but he only comes in the evening, and I cannot bear his mysterious behaviour. Do you know him?"

"I believe I do; I am not, however, quite sure of it. Does he come—but what is the matter with Wilson?"

Brown looked in amazement at his companion, who glided like a serpent into the thicket, and disappeared in a few seconds. The cause of this strange proceeding did not long remain an enigma; for almost at the same moment appeared the stately, and even yet youthful form of Mrs. Atkins, whose light dress had given Wilson warning just in time. He left his friend to get out of the dilemma in the best way he could.

"Hallo, Miss," cried the matron, advancing with rapid

strides, bearing her head erect; "hallo there! Gentlemen's company! I have not heard a single stroke for the last quarter of an hour; is the washing going to do itself?"

"The child!" stammered Ellen.

"What child? The child is sleeping as quietly as a lady-bird in her nest. These are vain excuses."

"I must beg of you to lay the blame upon me," said Brown to the angry woman. "I have come with a message from Mr. Roberts and Mr. Rowson, and hoped to spend the night here."

"You are not exactly in the right road," said Mrs. Atkins, apparently a little better pleased.

"I believe not," answered Brown, smiling, determined to defend the poor trembling girl to the utmost of his power; "I believe not; but I came through the forest part of the way, and when I arrived at the slough I did not know whether I ought to ride up or down, in order to reach the house quickest; I therefore crossed the brook, in order to reconnoitre the place, and found the young lady here, whom I am sorry to have disturbed at her work by my questions."

"Young lady! nonsense! Don't put such absurd ideas into the girl's head. However, my husband is at the house. Where is your horse? I will send the boy for it."

"I have fastened him up over there," Brown replied, resolved to take the angry matron back with him to the house. in order to give Wilson an opportunity of continuing his interview with Ellen.

"Well, come with me," said Mrs. Atkins; "and you, Miss, keep to work, and be industrious. You have not done half of the washing yet; it is a shame; and you have been here almost two hours. You will take good care to have it done before dark. And how is the little one?" she added, with real motherly tenderness that contrasted strangely with her usual rough accents. She bent down to the child's cradle, who expressed its joy by laughing and stamping merrily. "That's what the baby likes, isn't it? rocking, rocking, all day long, and then it wont sleep in the night, and Ellen must walk up and down with him until daybreak, the little rogue! But, I beg pardon; I have kept you waiting. Ellen, mind you work well."

As she turned to go, she glanced at the different foot-

prints, and then at Brown's boots; but the ground was too much trodden about for her to detect anything. She gave the baby a kiss, and proceeded, followed by Brown, towards the dwelling-house, which was situated on the borders of a large field.

CHAPTER XXII.

ATKINS'S DWELLING—THE STRANGE GUEST—THE WATCH-WORD.

ATKINS'S dwelling was much superior to the log-huts of the settlement, though it was constructed only of the trunks of trees. But these had been hewn with great care, and were somewhat polished both inside and outside. They formed two houses of two stories each, connected in the middle by a passage open to the north and to the south, the whole being under one roof. The interior presented a very comfortable appearance, and the well-planed boards, by which all unpleasant and unsightly gaps were avoided, bore evidence to the taste and ingenuity of the architect. The walls were adorned with advertisements of roving circus-companies, proprietors of wax dolls, and menageries—amongst which a very prominent figure was a man in uncommonly closely-fitting trousers, with two immense feathers stuck on a fantastic kind of cap. He was represented in the clutches of a lion, into which animal's ear he seemed to be whispering something of great importance.

One of these two buildings so much alike was used only for sleeping apartments; and five beds, with a proportionate number of mattresses and blankets, stood in the rooms. The walls were adorned by the wardrobe of the women, and the Sunday finery of the master of the house occupied a particular corner. Into this room guests were ushered only in the evening, at bedtime, when all the different couches were duly prepared. During the daytime it remained a sacred place; and it was even said that Mr. Atkins had on one occasion missed a prayer-meeting because his wife had gone out with the key in her pocket, and had unfortunately forgotten to lay out her lord and husband's clothes. The latter, who generally had a strong will of his own, had too much reverence for this sacred place to attempt a forcible entrance.

Brown was ushered into the parlour, where he found his host rocking himself on the hind legs of a chair, whistling a tune, while he kept whittling with a half-broken penknife a piece of cedar-wood. The entrance of his guest aroused him from his meditations; but he had hardly cast a glance towards the door, and recognised Brown, when, turning deadly pale, he sprang from his seat and looked at a rifle hanging over the door. He was only appeased when he perceived that the stranger had entered his house alone and apparently with no unfriendly design.

"Mr. Atkins," said Brown, somewhat astonished at the man's strange behaviour as he advanced towards him with extended hand, "I am very sorry if I have disturbed you."

"Oh, not in the least—not in the least," muttered the farmer; "it was only—I should have thought——"

"Of course this is the very day you would have least expected me. My long absence, my rare visits to this neighbourhood, the fact of my being almost an entire stranger, all tend to render me an unexpected guest. The times in which our destiny is cast must plead as an excuse for my intrusion."

"My dear Mr. Brown," said Atkins, who had regained all his self-possession, interrupting him, "don't mention it, pray; you are indeed a rare visitor, but not the less welcome for that; and I hope this may prove the beginning of a frequent and continued acquaintance."

"I desire nothing better," said Brown, shaking hands with him; "and it is possible that we may continue in another country the friendship commenced here. At least, I have been told that you think of emigrating to Texas."

"Yes, I do; and have you formed such a plan? If I have not been misinformed, I believe I may say that you have only recently joined the Regulators—that you have even become their leader."

"To that I answer yes and no," Brown replied, with a smile. "I have indeed joined them, and have also become one of their leaders. This, however, is but an affair of a few weeks. I shall retire as soon as we have discovered and punished the murderers of the two poor victims of whose untimely fate you have doubtless heard. When that is done I shall leave this State and become a citizen of the republic of Texas."

"And what about the horse-stealers?" Atkins inquired anxiously.

"I care but little about them, only that I am inclined to suspect that amongst them will be found the murderers, and consequently I shall proceed against them with all possible vigilance. Their traces seem indeed to be so well concealed that there is little hope of discovering them either quickly or easily; therefore I shall not form any strong resolutions on that point. For the present I have but one aim in view—namely, to hunt out those scoundrels who have shed the blood of innocent people; and may the Lord be merciful towards them if we once discover them, for from man they must not expect mercy."

"Strange," Atkins said, as if lost in deep thought, "that suspicion should not in either case have fallen upon any particular person. Yes, yes; I remember, it was you who were accused of the first of the two crimes; but several contradicted that report immediately. The women in particular took your part warmly. Moreover, your conduct towards Heathcott on the morning of your quarrel with him was, if I am well informed, not such as we should expect from a man afraid of meeting his adversary openly and frankly. You could not have had any reason for having recourse to such a cowardly method of removing an adversary. Some one must have murdered him for his money. That was the idea that struck me at first. Who was seen with him, and who knew the secret of his carrying a rather large sum about him, besides those who live about the Fourche-la-Fave here?"

"You do not, then, suppose that any one in our neighbourhood can be guilty of the deed?"

"Candidly speaking, I do not; for even those," he added, in a lower tone of voice, as if speaking to himself, "even those who might not be too particular with respect to questions of honesty, would, I believe, have shrunk from committing such a cold-blooded murder."

"I hope your opinion is correct," said Brown, with a sigh, leaning his arm on the mantelpiece, and covering his face with his hand; "I hope you are right. However, I am every day in expectation of the return of the Indian, and surely he will not come back without having gained some information."

"Not without some information, eh?" said Atkins. "Yes, the Indian is very cunning, but never seemed to understand much about tracing horses—at least, he did not show his skill the last time——"

"Because he did not apply himself on the occasion to which you allude," replied Brown. "The death of his wife preyed so much upon his mind, that I had anxious fears for his life. Moreover, he came a whole day too late, for the thieves had fled, and the rain had washed out the traces."

"That rain was a most disagreeable thing," said the farmer, rubbing his hands, unobserved by his guest, in a pleased and satisfied manner. "A most disagreeable thing. It washed out many traces, and aided the escape of those lucky scoundrels. They stole an excellent pair of horses from me last year."

"You ought, all of you, to have made a much bolder stand against them long ago; they have been allowed to go too far. In fact, they have grown so bold that they will take away the animals openly from under your eyes. It is even said, that there is among the settlers on the river an accomplice, who has a secret hiding-place for stolen horses."

"Who says so?" asked Atkins, starting up.

"It was mentioned at our last meeting," Brown replied, without observing this movement, or changing his position. "It has also been suggested that, if these depredations don't cease, a general search upon every farmer's place will be made."

"Everybody will not readily submit to such a proceeding," replied Atkins, ill-humouredly; "we live in a free country, and to anybody who comes upon my ground, without my leave, I shall give the order to march; and if he does not think fit to go, then I shall take down my rifle."

"You see, Mr. Atkins," said Brown, turning round in a friendly manner, "this is exactly the reason why the Regulators have been obliged to form their association and to maintain their league. The laws in Arkansas are not sufficiently stringent. A man against whom there is no positive proof, though he were the greatest rascal upon earth, might set us all at defiance. He imagines that he has the right to shoot any one who dares to come near him against his wish. Very well. Such a state of things affords a posi-

tive encouragement to crime, and the population is not sufficiently protected. What security can there be to property, if any thief may secrete goods without the chance of being detected? With horses, for instance, rainy weather washes out all the traces, and the rascals are perfectly safe, if they only choose their opportunity."

"But what are laws made for?" Atkins inquired, almost angrily. "What is the use of laws, I say, if they are too weak to effect the purpose for which they were framed?"

"They are not actually too weak," Brown replied; "but circumstances interfere to prevent their execution. Let me suppose, for the sake of the argument, that a criminal is really taken up by the sheriff, and is condemned by the judge. Where is he kept in custody until he can be handed over to the regular authorities of the State? He is put into one of the little block-houses that are used for this purpose, and from which his friends deliver him the very first night after his capture."

Atkins smiled.

"I have been told," Brown continued, without observing it, "that you have yourselves had several striking illustrations of the fact in this county. When the prisoner does, however, get into the State prison in Little-rock, he is very seldom properly secured. Have not—at least the rumour is abroad—several of the criminals who have escaped themselves declared that the prison is so badly built that the sheriff cannot get them in quicker than they can get out? Of what use then is it for us to obey the laws and hand over criminals to Government? We imagine, of course, that they will be kept in custody; but in less than a fortnight they are again at liberty, committing depredations upon our property."

"Oh, yes," said Atkins, smiling, "the complaint is not entirely without foundation; I know that Cotton——"

"Where is Cotton at present?" asked Brown, quickly.

"Cotton!" replied Atkins, sharply, and apparently very much astonished. "Cotton! how should I know? If the sheriff is looking for him, as I have been told that he is, why should you inquire after him?"

"I hear that he has been seen in this neighbourhood," Brown replied, who did not wish to mention Ellen as his informant, as he feared that he might get the poor girl into

a scrape. His host's evasive manner of talking, and the fact of his denying any knowledge of Cotton's whereabouts, raised his suspicions. "He is even said to have been observed on this road," he added.

"Oh, yes, that's very possible, very possible indeed," said Atkins, with a smile. "Many people ride along this road whom I do not even see. Folks like to talk."

"I came here to-day upon an errand for Roberts and Rowson," said Brown, who wished to give another turn to the conversation. "Mr. Roberts—but here comes my horse," he exclaimed suddenly, as one of Atkins's servants led his chestnut horse up to the door.

"Pray remain here," said his host, observing that Brown was about to leave the room. "Dan will attend to the horse. Dan, take the horse to the stable, give him a good feed, and then put the saddle and the other things in the space between the houses, and when you have done——"

While speaking, Atkins stepped out of the house, and finished the sentence in a lower tone of voice, so that Brown could not hear what he said. The man, however, nodded significantly, as much as to say that he fully understood the hint given him. He led the animal away, and was not seen again during the evening.

"You were going to deliver a message to me," Atkins said to his guest, stepping back into the house.

"Yes," Brown replied, as if awaking from a trance. "Mr. Rowson will come here on Monday morning with his—with his father-in-law, in order to have a look at your house and grounds, and he hopes that you will be kind enough to wait at home for him, if he should be detained, and not get here so soon as he might wish."

"Well, I will do so," replied Atkins, in a pleased manner. "I think that we shall be able to do business together. They are, both of them, very good sort of people, who will not be hard upon a poor devil about to emigrate. The wedding is to take place the day after to-morrow, is it not?"

"Yes," replied Brown, in a low voice; "I believe so—the day after to-morrow."

"You will be present at the ceremony, wont you?"

"Who! I? no; I believe I shall not; our meeting is likely

to last until late in the evening, and in that case I shall spend the night at Barill's."

"What meeting?"

"A meeting of the Regulators; we shall meet to-morrow at Barill's."

"A meeting to-morrow! It must have been fixed very secretly indeed. I never heard a syllable about it."

"Of course word was only sent to those who are Regulators; but I am astonished," continued Brown, who fancied that he saw a favourable opportunity for putting in a good word for poor Wilson, "I am astonished that Wilson did not tell you about it—he promised to convey the intelligence to people in this neighbourhood, and there was no necessity for making a mystery of it."

"Mr. Wilson has not been in my house for a long while," answered Atkins, who seemed agitated at the mere mention of his name; "and thus it happens that I did not hear anything of the matter. It is all the same, as I am not a Regulator, and consequently have no interest in the meeting. I have been told that in Texas similar associations have been formed."

"Yes," said Brown, unwilling to give up his attack so easily, and resolved to make another trial. "Wilson seems to mean to settle permanently in this neighbourhood," he continued, thus bringing the conversation back to the point from which Atkins seemed anxious to turn it away; "and I believe you could not wish for a better neighbour."

"You appear to forget that I can hardly reckon myself as belonging to this part of the country," replied Atkins, "as I shall sell out immediately, perhaps on Monday, but—— here's my good wife with the dinner-things. How short the days are! I forgot to ask you, Mr. Brown, how your uncle is going on; we were all very sorry to hear that he had been confined to the house by a fever. One cannot keep off these cursed fevers, and they frequently attack the strongest men in the worst form."

Brown perceived that it would be utterly impossible for him to do anything to advance his friend's interests, at least for the present.

Mrs. Atkins, and soon afterwards Ellen with the baby,

returned to the house. He would willingly have entered into conversation with the pretty girl, but he was afraid of getting her into a scrape. A friendly glance she cast slyly at him told him plainly enough that she understood his former kindness, in taking Mrs. Atkins off. Brown concluded that she had made the best use of the opportunity afforded by her absence. The conversation turned upon subjects of general interest, such as pasture, hunting, a survey of the neighbouring lands, and the quarrels among the settlers, which were not unfrequently connected with that survey, a murder which had been committed a few days before on the other bank of the Arkansas, when a cattle-dealer had been shot, and his pocket-book, which was said to have contained about a thousand dollars, had been taken. No clue had hitherto been obtained that might lead to the detection of the murderer. Then they talked about legislation, the election of sheriff and governor, and so on, until the Yankee clock, which adorned the chimney-piece, struck eight. The little one, which had slumbered quietly in its cradle, grew restless, and began to cry. Ellen took it out of its nest, and walked up and down the room, humming a lullaby; but it would not go to sleep again. It cried more and more; and in the course of a quarter of an hour it seemed to be so ill that the women, frightened to death, kept running in all directions, in search of whatever remedies the house afforded.

Everything was in vain, and the mulatto and a white labourer, who had been employed during the week cutting a large pirogue* out of an immense trunk of a tree, were sent by the agonized mother in different directions, in order to summon such assistance for the poor little sufferer as the wives of the farmers in the neighbourhood could afford. All who were supposed to understand anything of infants' diseases were asked to come as quickly as their horses could bring them.

The mother, in the meanwhile, behaved like a person who was raving mad, and continually reproached poor Ellen with having neglected the child. She even declared that the poor girl wished to get rid of it, that she might no longer be bothered with having to nurse it. In vain Ellen asserted her innocence, and reminded the mother of the love she had

* Large canoe.

always borne the little one. All she could say produced no effect upon Mrs. Atkins, who told her to hold her tongue, if she did not wish to learn how obstinate servants were treated.

Brown felt indignant at this, and resolved to do everything in his power to aid his friend, and to get the poor girl away from people who treated her so badly. Aware that anything he might say would only increase the annoyances to which it was but too evident that Ellen was subjected, he resolved to bide his time.

The confusion had reached the highest possible pitch. The poor little sufferer seemed to grow worse every moment. Ellen endeavoured, with weeping eyes, to soothe her favourite; while Mrs. Atkins, quite heedless of the presence of the stranger, ran up and down the room, wringing her hands, declaring that this was a punishment from Heaven, who now struck her, in the person of the poor innocent child, for all her sins and wickedness. Of a sudden, a strange voice was heard outside, asking for admittance. The dogs were roused, and began to bark and growl fiercely. The wind, which during the day had blown gently from the south, had now changed, and came from the north-east in violent gusts, whistling through the branches of the gigantic trees. When the door was opened, the candle, which stood on the table, was blown out; and thus, the fire in the chimney-place being at a low ebb, the house was suddenly left in darkness.

"Hallo, in there! can I have a night's lodging here?" the voice again cried. "The deuce take the dogs—will you be quiet?"

"Quiet, Hector! quiet, Dick! Down with you, you beasts—can't you let a man speak?" cried Atkins, who had stepped into the doorway. "Come in," he said to the stranger, "my boy shall attend to the horse."

"Will the dogs bite?" asked the other, cautiously, as, in acceptation of the invitation, he put his leg over the fence.

"No," said Atkins, "not when I am present. Come in, and mind you do not fall over the timber there. Don't hurt yourself—mind, there are three steps down, the lower one is rather unsteady. Oh, Ellen, do light the candle again."

Ellen had, in the meantime, been very busily engaged lighting the chimney-fire, and the room was soon again suf-

ficiently illumined for the different occupants to see each other's faces.

The stranger stepped into the apartment, put down his old coat, and the cap of otter-skin, and with a salute stepped up to the chimney, and into the bright reflection of the fire, which again flamed up vigorously. He was a little stout man, with lively grey eyes, long yellowish hair, and many freckles on his face. He was dressed in a brown woollen hunting-shirt, and gaiters of the same kind. He carried an old saddle-pouch upon his arm, which he now put down in the chimney-corner; it seemed to contain everything which he wanted for a ride through the wood, and in such a wild country. His eyes, as he approached the two men, glanced eagerly from one to the other, and he seemed to consult within himself which of the two he was to address as the master of the house.

Mrs. Atkins was not apparently very well pleased with her new guest, for, with an ill-humoured expression, she took the little sufferer, covered it with a blanket, and told Ellen to follow her with a light into the other house, where she ordered a fire to be kindled immediately. Ellen quickly obeyed the order, and it appeared probable that Mrs. Atkins would not be again visible during the evening.

"It blows quite a gale," said the stranger, after a long pause, in which he seemed to be speculating on the probabilities as to which of the two men before him might be his host. "It blows as if it meant to tear the oaks up by the roots."

"Yes, it is rather boisterous outside," said Atkins, casting an inquisitive glance at his visitor,—"do you come from a long distance?"

"No, not very far; only from the Mississippi."

"You are going to the west, I presume?"

"Yes, to Fort Gibson; how far is it to the Fourche-la-Fave?"

"I live on that river," said Atkins, looking at the stranger, while Brown, who had before felt rather uncomfortable at the screams of the child and the entrance of the new comer, now took his seat again near the fire, and amused himself by stirring it with the poker.

"You have followed the course of the river for several miles," he said, taking part in the conversation; "but you

did not see the stream, the reedland being almost a quarter of a mile broad, and very thick."

"Yes, I thought that the river could not be far from my road—that's very fine reed. Is the pasture good hereabouts?"

"Very good," replied Atkins; and again he fixed his eye upon the stranger. Brown left off stirring the fire, and, quite absorbed, let the wooden poker fall among the glowing embers which flamed high up. He looked musingly into the chimney, as if he wished to recal to memory something which he had almost forgotten.

"I have been riding rather sharply," the stranger said at last, breaking the general silence, "and the wind has made one thirsty. May I ask you for a drink of water?"

"Of course you may," replied Atkins, rising and hastening to the bucket to fetch some water. Brown, in whose mind a sudden thought now flashed, looked earnestly at the stranger. The latter seemed bent on examining him closely, but turned quickly towards Atkins, took the water from his hand, and drank freely.

"Hearing you ask for water, reminds me that I am thirsty myself," said Brown, quite composedly. He remembered with perfect distinctness the conversation which he had overheard in the hut on the Arkansas, and did not mean on any account to let the two men perceive that his suspicions had been aroused.

"Stop, gentlemen," exclaimed Atkins, "you drink the cold stuff while such a storm howls outside. How would it be if we were just to put a few drops of whisky into it? That will be a great improvement, and thus qualified, the cold water can do no harm."

"I imagine that the whisky will not hurt either of us," said the stranger, quite pleased, while their host went to a cupboard, and speedily produced a jug and three tin cups.

"Here, Mr. Brown—help yourself," said Atkins, holding out the jug to him; "oh, do it properly, that's but a drop. That looks better—don't be afraid of it. The more boisterous it is outside, the more we must try to make ourselves comfortable inside. And now, sir, what is your name? Mine is Atkins, and this gentleman is called Brown."

"My name is Jones," answered the guest, "John Jones;

that's not difficult to remember, is it? Well, let's drink to our better acquaintance. Mr. Atkins, your good health—Mr. Brown." He raised his glass to his lips, and a strange expression passed over Atkins's features, as the man, who called himself Jones, drank to the Regulator's good health and better acquaintance. Careful not to betray himself even by a glance of his eye, he speedily checked himself, and his features reassumed their wonted appearance.

Again he pledged his guests with seeming goodwill, saying, "May we become and always remain good friends."

Ellen had meanwhile spread out the mattresses and blankets upon the ground. To Atkins's inquiry about the baby, she replied that it still suffered great pain, while nobody seemed to know what was the matter with it.

"Can you be spared for a quarter of an hour from nursing?" asked her father.

"I hardly know, Mrs. ——"

"Very well; just put the things to the fire," said Atkins, checking himself. "You must get a little supper ready for Mr. Jones. I will speak to Mrs. Atkins about it while you are doing the work."

He left the room, and Ellen soon completed all the necessary preparations for the simple meal of western farmers. It consisted of nothing more than warm maize-bread, fried bacon, hot coffee, and some butter, cheese, and honey. The two men sat quietly in the chimney, and Brown watched the slender form of the pretty girl. She appeared to attend to all her duties carefully. Jones, as if buried in deep thought, kept poking the fire and knocking off the glowing embers from the logs—a labour in which he only from time to time paused in order to cast a somewhat impatient glance, first at the clock, which stood over the chimney-piece, then at the door by which he expected Atkins to come back.

The host at last made his appearance, and supper was by that time ready. More cooking was however in store for Ellen, as horses' hoofs were heard outside; the voices of several women mingled in the din, and the sharp accents of Mrs. Atkins giving orders for coffee from the other house rose above every sound.

Brown was sitting quietly in the chimney-corner, resting his head upon the mantelpiece, when Atkins lighted a candle,

and said to him, in a very courteous manner—"Mr. Brown, you seem tired; here is a candle; and if you like to go to bed I will show you your bedroom."

"Pray, do not give yourself any trouble on my account," said the young man, who noticed the beds Ellen had put together in the corner. "I can wait, and am by no means sleepy."

"We have a bed up here," replied Atkins, "where there is no fear that you will be disturbed; and to-morrow morning, as soon as you have a mind, you can repair to Barill's. We shall not get much rest down here; I hear that several of the farmers' wives have arrived. The child must really be worse than I at first imagined."

"You seem to have plenty of lady-visitors."

"Alas, too many," said the farmer, with a sigh; "and Heaven grant that the poor little thing may have strength to recover, or they will *talk* it to death, and——"

"Well, under the circumstances, I really think it will be better for me to retire," said the young man, smiling. "Good night, gentlemen. Mr. Jones will join me later, I suppose?"

"There is only one bed upstairs. I shall have to try to accommodate Mr. Jones down here."

"Oh, don't give yourself any trouble upon my account," said Jones, holding out his cup to Ellen, who filled it from a large tin vessel. "Good night, then. If you don't leave too early to-morrow, I shall perhaps have the pleasure of going part of the way with you; though, I remember, I hardly know in what direction you are travelling."

"Up the river. I shall be off very early," said Brown, in reply; "so good night."

He nodded to the young woman, and the next moment disappeared with his host into the upper part of the house, which was, after all, of very simple and somewhat rude construction.

Atkins soon returned with the candle, and he, as well as the stranger, kept a strict silence so long as Ellen remained in the room. She had to make the bed for the guest, and to clear away the tray and cloth. At last she had finished everything. She put the candle upon the table, took the coffee-pot and a basketfull of cups with her to the other house, and retired with a gentle "Good night," which was

not heard by either of the men, or, at least, not noticed by them. No sooner had she left the room than Atkins rose, put out the candle, so that the room was only partially lighted by the embers in the hearth, and motioned to his guest to follow him.

"Somebody has sent you to me," he said, in an undertone, when he had led him some distance from the house, so that they might not be overheard.

"Yes," replied the stranger. "What is your name?"

"Atkins."

"Very good—I bring you some horses."

"Where are they?"

"At the bend, near the brook."

"Are they in the water, then?"

"Of course they are."

"But how do you know the place? have you ever been in this neighbourhood before?"

"I should think so," said the other, smiling. "Here I spent my earliest years. Brogan got this place of me, and he sold it to you."

"It is you, then, who made that secret——"

"Yes, but enough of that," said Jones, cautiously; "what's the use of giving things their proper names? some one might, this dark night, overhear us. I never speak much about these matters. The entrance is near the corner of the fence."

"It is; just where the stream flows past."

"Very well; you had better see about getting the horses under cover."

"I will go and fetch them."

"Don't you require help?"

"I can manage till we get them inside the fence," said the stranger, as he turned away from his host, and disappeared in the dark.

Atkins returned to the house, went cautiously round it, crossed the yard towards a kind of shed, where six or eight horses were running about, got over the fence, and was soon lost in the surrounding darkness.

Brown, perceiving through the chinks in the roof that the two men went together from the house, was thereby confirmed in his suspicions, and was for some time undecided whether to follow them, and catch them in the act, or to

remain where he was, and let them quietly finish their nocturnal business. What could he do, alone and unarmed, against them? They were certainly prepared against any surprise; he might give them warning of the discovery he had made, and thus all chance of their detection would be lost. Actuated by these considerations, he remained quietly stretched upon his couch, and meditated upon the facts and circumstances of the day.

Ellen, the poor innocent girl, was certainly not an accomplice in these dreadful proceedings, or she would not so naïvely have spoken of the visits of Cotton, for whom the authorities had been for some time searching. Where did this Cotton live? where was there a hut or a thicket that could so long conceal a criminal in the neighbourhood? Evidently his retreat was close at hand, for he could hardly dare to walk any long distance, especially during the daytime. Where was his hiding-place? The young man then run over the names of the settlers in the neighbourhood. There was Wilson; he could not be with him. Pelter; he, too, was one of the Regulators. Johnson; that might be possible. Fresh suspicions now flashed across his mind. Johnson's horses had been found the night they had pursued the horse-stealers. Harfield, however, declared he was certain that he had seen the prints of his own horses' hoofs. He was sure that the traces on the northern bank of the river were those of his own horses; and yet, while following those on the southern bank, they came upon other animals. Curtis, Cook, and Harfield affirmed that some very large prints of one particular horse had not been seen anywhere on the previous day. Johnson and Cotton—between these two, then, there must be some kind of understanding. Brown's ideas grew confused; the different figures and places he had seen mingled themselves, forming various motley images; and at last he dreamt he was transformed into the preacher Rowson, and that Marion was bending over him, and kissing him, and calling him by the most tender names. Even in his dream his heart grieved that all this should be meant for the image of his rival. At last even these visions faded, and his mind, as well as his body, overcome by the anxieties and exertions of the day, sank into a profound slumber.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEPREDATORS—UNEXPECTED GUESTS—THE NEW PLAN.

THE reader must imagine that it is twilight, on the same evening in which the scenes described in our last chapter occurred, and we must transport him to a small, but rather snug log-hut, which stood in the middle of the forest, and seemed not to be connected with the different habitations in the neighbourhood by any road or distinguishable path. In this hut Johnson lived. He had bought the place of a hunter about a year before the period at which our tale commences for the sum of twenty dollars cash, a blanket, and a bowie-knife. He had, indeed, made a beginning towards cultivating a field, but soon abandoned the attempt, and fenced in a little yard, to keep away from his door the swine and cows that were left to wander freely in the wood. The place also served for a horse he made use of in his various excursions. As he was but very rarely to be found at home, and as his hut, as we before mentioned, was situated in an out-of-the-way part, he was troubled with but few visitors, and those that did venture so far were generally bold hunters who had lost the track in pursuit of game. The owner of the hut thus desired solitude, and his wish was completely fulfilled.

The only person in the neighbourhood with whom he had any intercourse was Atkins. The mulatto, who was entrusted with his master's secrets, often went from one to the other, bearing messages. On the evening in question, the solitary hut bore by no means a desolate or dreary appearance. In the chimney a bright, cheerful fire was crackling; on a long iron pole, reaching across it, hung a large iron pot, and around the glow were sitting, on a low chair and a stool, Cotton and Johnson, absorbed in close conversation, and both of them anxiously looking forward to the boiling of the contents of the pot or kettle before them.

"Listen, Johnson, here are bubbles coming up," said Cotton, impatiently; "go on, that I may get my drink. I must make haste, or I shall not find Atkins at home."

"Only wait a few seconds more. The drink will be flat and insipid if the water does not boil properly," replied his companion. "But stop; now it begins. Reach me your cup; I will not detain you longer."

"The deuce! it is hot," said the other, putting the tin cup to his lips. "In these cursed vessels nothing gets cool."

"Well, that can't be helped," said Johnson, laughing; "we can't afford glass and porcelain here. But who the deuce comes here?"

"Where?" cried Cotton, scrambling up the little ladder which connected the upper part of the house with the lower.

"Oh, you can remain where you are," said Johnson, who had approached one of the crevices to reconnoitre; "it is only Dan, Atkins's mulatto."

"What the deuce does he want?" said Cotton, astonished, coming back and resuming his former seat. "I hope he does not bring bad news."

"Here he is, and may speak for himself," said Johnson, opening the door, and letting the faithful servant in. "Well, what do you bring us?"

"Massa Cotton is to remain up here," replied the mulatto, showing his teeth, and taking off his hat. "Massa Brown is with master, and will sleep there."

"Brown! What brings him there?" exclaimed Cotton, angrily; "and just now, when I have important business to talk over with Atkins."

"He is on his way to attend a meeting of the Regulators to-morrow, at Barill's," said the mulatto, spitting his tobacco into the chimney, with considerable familiarity.

"Meeting of the Regulators—a plague on it!" said Cotton, gnashing his teeth. "If I could do as I liked, I would lead those fellows a pretty dance to-morrow. Only let them wait—their time will come; and if they cannot be dealt with in the lump, yet they may be taken in detail."

"Has your master sent any other message to us?" asked Johnson.

"No, massa; nothing more. I believe he will come up here to-morrow himself."

"Then, tell him that we shall expect him. Do you hear? What are you standing there for, staring?"

"Massa," said the mulatto, and his ivory teeth became

visible from one end of his mouth to the other—one might, perhaps, say with more truth, from ear to ear. "Massa, there stands an empty cup."

"Oh, the rogue is thirsty," said Johnson, laughing. "Very well, take it; drink, and get yourself gone."

"Thank you, massa," said Dan, pouring the hot beverage down his throat.

Having disposed of it, he nodded a good evening to both, and soon after dashed through the thick sassafras bushes that surrounded the place, on his way home.

"Well," said Cotton, reclining at his ease, "I can at least make myself at home this evening, and shall not have to go out. Brown! Regulators! A plague upon those fellows! I wish that the d——"

He paused suddenly in his conversation on hearing the clatter of a horse's hoofs outside; and he again displayed the same alacrity as before in running up his ladder, that he might withdraw from the observation of the new-comer. Once more his precaution proved needless. Johnson, who was on the look-out, exclaimed, with astonishment—"Rowson!" and before Cotton could return to the fire, or Johnson open the door, their friend was knocking and demanding admittance.

"What the deuce makes you keep one waiting outside?" Rowson exclaimed, impatiently, as Johnson was not so quick in opening the door as he expected.

"Hallo!" said Cotton, laughing, as the door opened. "Are you preaching? You must be in a wonderful hurry. Suppose that we had just now, by chance, some strangers with us; would not the Methodist cut a nice figure with his mouth full of curses?"

"A plague upon them all!" said the preacher, angrily; "it will soon be perfectly indifferent whether the people here think I am praying or cursing. I must be off."

"What?" cried Johnson, terrified, jumping up from the chair on which he had but just taken his seat. "Have they discovered that——"

"Nonsense," returned the preacher, angrily; "you had better mind what you are saying. Nothing has as yet been discovered. Still there is great risk that at any moment a revelation may take place. The Indian has returned."

"I wish he had remained where he was," exclaimed Cotton; "that Red-skin has always been a thorn in my side, and I would give much to have him put out of the way."

"Never mind; the Indian, after all, wont carry everything before him," said Johnson, with a satanic smile. The hunter at the same time filled his cup again, and offered another to Rowson, who accepted the challenge, and emptied it at a draught. "The traces disappeared long ago; and without their aid the copper-coloured rascal can do nothing."

"That is not all," continued the Methodist. "The people about here have gone mad again with the old Regulator mania. To-morrow a large meeting will be held, and *there are several suspicious persons in the neighbourhood* whom they mean to take up, and, as a matter of course, *to subject to a rigid examination.* How do you like that?"

"The devil!" cried Johnson. "Under the circumstances, a change of air will do me a wonderful deal of good. They are sure to visit this retreat before they do anything else. I do not, however, see what *you* have to fear. Nobody, surely, can have thrown the slightest suspicion upon you?"

"It is the Indian who makes me uneasy," said Rowson. "If I only knew some means of getting rid of that rascal."

"It would be rather a difficult thing to do," said Cotton, musing; "yet not altogether impossible."

"Then you wish to increase the stir and excitement in the country, do you? No; blood enough has been shed in these parts already; and the better plan will be to look out for some other retreat, and that as quickly as possible, for the storm may burst upon our heads any day."

"The thing might be managed, with caution," continued the other, not paying any attention to Rowson's interruption. "It is reported that the Indian killed the chief of one of his tribes, and fled hither in consequence. Nothing, then, could be more natural than that some relative of the murdered man should follow him into these parts to pay the debt of blood. In order to execute a thing of this kind safely and in the usual manner, it would of course be necessary to make use of a poisoned arrow; and one has not lived for years in Texas and in Arkansas without having learnt how to prepare such a weapon."

"Do *you* understand how to prepare the poison?" asked Rowson, quickly.

"Of what use is it if he does?" Johnson observed, angrily; "the Indian is but one person, whom we might easily enough keep at bay. The danger is more imminent. When rascally Regulators really get upon the right scent, and at last lay hold of us, the devil might stand godfather to us. No; what Rowson says is quite right; and it would be better for all of us if we were on the other side of Uncle Sam's territory. Still, I do not fancy that there is any immediate hurry; at any rate, we can wait a little. Some of us have never been suspected—for instance, Rowson, and even Atkins. You can therefore attend their meetings; and should you hear anything that seems suspicious, it will then be time enough to mount our horses and to ride off. We shall soon find as good a field for our exertions as we have found in Arkansas."

"I rather doubt that," said Rowson; "moreover, it is all very well for you bachelors to talk; for when the crisis arrives, you have but to spring into the saddle, and you are free men. But I——"

"Why, surely you are a bachelor too?" Johnson observed.

"Yes, to-day I am; but I shall not be after to-morrow."

"You take much too gloomy a view of matters," said Cotton, laughing. "Hang it! if I had such a name in the neighbourhood as you have, and were as well liked by the women as you are, ten horses would not drag me out of the county. But if you really are so afraid of an exposure, why the deuce *do* you marry? Can't you put the affair off a little? It will be rather disagreeable whenever one comes to see you to be always upon one's guard."

"I cannot retreat now without creating suspicion," said the preacher, pacing up and down the room in great agitation. "If I had known of the danger this morning—then it would at least have been possible to postpone the wedding; but now—a plague upon it! let me only get married, and my wife must follow me wherever I go. I can easily trump up an excuse. A letter from my old aunt in Memphis, expressing her desire to see me again before her death, will be sufficient. If I once get off safely, they may say whatever they like about me. I will take care

that they don't catch me again. I must confess that I do not like that Indian; I am afraid of that accursed Red-skin."

"Well," Cotton muttered, angrily, "if he should become dangerous, he can be removed at any time quickly enough. Just now, as you before observed, such a course would only create more ill-feeling among the settlers, already sufficiently excited. Be it our care at present to prepare——"

"I wish you would leave that accursed Indian out of the question," said Johnson, impatiently; "it is the Regulators whom we have to fear; their association is the quarter from which danger threatens us, and let us, therefore, look in that direction. Can't you attend their meeting, Rowson?"

"Yes—at least I hope so," he replied. "They can make no serious objection to my presence. At any rate, I intend to try it on."

"In that case why should we fret and torment ourselves to death for nothing? It will be easy for you to obtain information of every important step they are about to take, and we need stand under no apprehension of being surprised."

"Under the circumstances, I do not think it will be advisable for me to buy Atkins's house and land," said Rowson; "the devil might play us a trick after all, and then I should be terribly deceived."

"That depends upon how you are off for cash," answered Johnson; "if you can spare the two hundred dollars which he demands, you might lull suspicion by making the purchase; but if——"

"Yes, you are right," said Rowson, quickly coming to a determination; "I will buy the place on Monday next. Moreover, I shall, from this day forth, give up these transactions. I will, at least, try to live as an honest man, and to enjoy tranquillity."

"It is almost time that you did," said Cotton, with a glance full of mistrust. "In that case, I should advise the reverend gentleman to take his young wife to the Island, and to settle there—it would offer a first-rate field for a missionary."

Rowson turned away, evidently annoyed; but Johnson continued the conversation by observing to the Methodist—

"As Cotton speaks of the Island, I believe it is time to make

me acquainted with all the particulars; I do, indeed, know that it is situated in the Mississippi, and have a pretty tolerable idea of its whereabouts. Though I have twice taken horses there, I have never yet set foot upon it. The rogues who received the animals were so mysterious in their behaviour, that nothing was to be got out of them."

"I was treated in a similar manner the other day," said Cotton, with an oath. "Had the Regulators been upon our heels, they would no doubt have caught us. These Islanders would not even allow us to step into their boat. We had to deliver up the horses, and Weston and I remained squatting on the bank, and two hours afterwards they came back and brought us the money. Weston almost died from curiosity."

"Listen, then," whispered Rowson, as if afraid of spies. "Nobody can hear us from the outside?"

"No, no," said Johnson; "you may speak with perfect safety. Yet I wish Cotton had kept his dog here, instead of leaving it at Atkins's."

"It is better where it is," Cotton observed. "But go on. Time presses, and I am tired."

"Very well," said Rowson. "I do not see why you should not know the whole of that secret, part of which has already been entrusted to you. You know the Island—at least, the way to it. Further down there is another, with several splendid hiding-places, affording a sure refuge in case the inhabitants of the upper island should be attacked or hunted out. A good swimmer can easily swim over to the lower island, especially in the night-time. The fellows to whom these places belong used to be under the leadership of *Morell*, who at present is a shoemaker, or something of that kind, in the House of Correction in Philadelphia. At any rate, they have taught him a handicraft. At this moment, the man in authority on the Island is a certain—but never mind, the name is of no consequence—I have, moreover, taken an oath not to divulge it."

"Is it, then, a well-organized band of robbers?" Cotton asked.

"Yes; the best organized band that ever existed, and almost safe against discovery; for it is the interest of those with whom they are connected to support, but never to betray them."

"And how do they manage to carry on their business, since they never commit depredations against their neighbours, who do not even suspect their presence?"

"They imitate the example of the fox," said Rowson, laughing, "who never robs the farmyards near his own den, or, at least, only does so in the greatest extremity."

"Let us have no more of your moral observations, if you please," said Cotton; "do keep to the subject."

"Very well, then, to the subject. With the States in the midst of which they live they have very little to do. They carry on their operations to the east, and with the Mississippi States their connexions are very extensive. This is why they stand so much in need of our horses. The principal part of their spoil comes to them down the river. In all large towns, on the Mississippi as well as the Ohio, on the Wabash, the Illinois, yea, even the Missouri, they have their agents, mostly young fellows from Kentucky and Illinois. They know every craft that goes down the river, and what cargoes they carry. If it happens to be anything they require, or anything they think they can quickly dispose of in the southern cities and to their advantage, they try to procure the berth of mate, pilot, or something else on board. They steer the doomed vessel down the stream, until they come opposite the Island, when they run it ashore, generally pretending it to be an accident. This is usually done at night-time, when there is but one of the regular crew upon deck. By a signal determined upon beforehand, they announce the approach of fresh booty, and as for the crew—why, they soon put them out of the way."

"That accounts," exclaimed Cotton, "for the numbers of corpses that may be always seen floating about in the Mississippi. Last February I was in Natchez, and seven floated by at one time, and not one of them bore traces of any wounds. We imagined at the time that they came from some boat which had foundered."

"Oh, yes, they know how to manage matters," said Rowson, smiling. "But in good truth, I don't like that kind of business; it is too bloody for my taste. I don't want to have anything to do with it."

"Nor I either," said Cotton, shuddering, "Heaven be

merciful to us! that is making regular butchery of it. But how do they manage when there are women in the boats?"

"Young women are taken care of in the interior of the Island, for every member is allowed to have a wife."

"Then they do not kill their female captives?" said Johnson, nervously.

"I do not know whether they do or not, and besides, it is no business of mine," replied Rowson. "The great protection to those in the Island is, that it may always be regarded as a last asylum by every one. If our affairs come to a crisis, we are sure to be received there, and to be protected also; you may rely upon that."

"I saw enough of their protection the last time I was there," cried Cotton. "I might have died upon the shore before one of the rogues would have stretched out a hand to aid me."

"Because you did not know the right signal," said Rowson, laughing. "Do you suppose they would take anybody whom they might meet at the landing-place into their confidence?"

"What is the proper signal then?"

"To run four times up and down between the two large trees, which stand upon the shore there—of course this must be done at night, with a burning piece of wood in one's hand. Just try that, and you will see how soon a boat with armed men will make its appearance."

"Four times," said Cotton, thoughtfully. "Well, who knows how soon we may all of us be compelled to throw ourselves upon the hospitality of those people?"

"When once you enter the Island," continued Rowson, "you belong to them, and must not hope to return."

"Have you been there?" asked the hunter.

"No, not yet," the Methodist replied, rather abruptly; "but where is Weston? would it not be as well to inform him of the danger with which we are threatened?"

"Atkins has sent him to the upper settlements," observed Johnson; "he is to be back to-morrow, and will then pay us a visit here."

"All right," said Cotton, yawning; "I am tired, and shall go to bed. Is there anything left in the kettle, Johnson?"

"No, you have the remainder before you in the cup."

"Well, good night; he who wakes first must call the others." Having said this, he spread out a few deer-skins which were lying in a corner, drew an old blanket over his shoulders, laid down upon his hard couch, and in a few minutes fell asleep.

Johnson and Rowson sat for some time in silence staring at the glowing embers. Both evidently had something which they desired to speak about, but neither of them seemed willing to open the subject. The Methodist walked several times up and down the room, and then stood still leaning against the chimney-piece. At last Johnson broke silence, by asking—

"Are you really afraid that we are discovered?"

"No," replied the preacher, in a scarcely audible tone of voice. "No, but I am afraid that we shall be."

"How is that possible?"

"Possible! you should ask, how is it possible that we have escaped detection so long."

"You are timid, and see spectres everywhere."

"At any rate, such foolishness cannot do anybody any harm," replied the preacher, with a cautious look. "I am afraid that the Indian has grown suspicious; the glance he cast at me to-day almost forbids the possibility of doubt."

"You have, indeed, particular reasons for dreading the resentment of the Indian," whispered Johnson.

"Who told you——"

"Whist! our host," said his friend. "Do not be alarmed; it is perhaps better for you that I should be made acquainted with the matter. Moreover, the thing was necessary, and I should have acted in the same manner; but have you taken care to remove all traces?"

"That question is superfluous. I washed my clothes the same night, though that was rather a hard job, with the wound in my arm. I cut out the rent in my coat, made by the tomahawk of the little she-devil, and put another patch there, and my knife I buried for a whole week. In spite of all this, an indescribable alarm seizes me when I consider the events of that evening, and I do not know, but I almost seem to rue——"

"Oh, nonsense!" said Johnson, scornfully; "how is it with that other affair—have you recovered the little knife?"

"No," replied Rowson, in a whisper, in a still lower key

than the former one; "that is in Roberts's hands; I saw it myself. He showed it to me, and asked me whether I knew whose it was. How it was, Johnson, that I did not betray myself at that moment I really hardly know."

"It is said that near the Arkansas a rich fellow has been waylaid and robbed of more than a thousand dollars," observed Johnson, with a sharp glance at his friend. "You were in that part of the country at the time. Did you not hear anything of the affair?"

"Oh, a plague upon your mad talk!" said the preacher, with an oath. "Do you suppose that I can account for every murder that has been committed in the State? Mind your own business, and let me alone. Are you certain that Weston does not talk? We ought not to have sent him to the Island."

"I believe he is faithful," replied Johnson, thoughtfully. "By Heaven! one cannot look into other people's hearts. You really mean to get married to-morrow?"

"Yes, I do; though not under the fairest auspices, it is true. I believe it to be the best thing I can do. If we are discovered, the deuce may take everything. It will not be the worst of my offences to let my wife take her chance with the rest."

"If such are your principles, matrimony will not stand much in your way," said his friend, laughing. "You do not care much about the girl, I suppose?"

"Do you think I should have exposed myself to all these perils in order to gain her if I did *not* love her?" replied the preacher. "It is a wild and mad passion that attracts me to that pure being; and I feel that this love is the greatest sin I ever committed in my life."

"And yet you can think of leaving her?"

"Show me any possibility of taking her with me in my flight against her will, and you will find me perfectly ready. But it wont do. Any stranger to whom she might appeal would grant her protection; and that's just the kind of thing I wish to avoid. No; if I *could* now retrace my steps, I might do so; perhaps, even if I had the chance, I might not avail myself of it. It is, however, too late; and so she must share my fate as long as it may be possible. She will, at least, be mine."

"Have you taken any measures of precaution in your house, in case flight should become necessary at some time or other?"

"I think you have known me long enough to be certain that I should not neglect that," said the preacher. "In the reedland immediately below the house a good canoe lies carefully concealed. In it is a little portmanteau with all requisites for travel. It has been packed ever since the night when the Indian woman discovered us, and my arms are always ready and at hand—you yourself know the secret way."

"How many will the canoe hold?"

"Four, or five in case of necessity. It is large, and splendidly built. With three oars we can reach the Arkansas in six hours."

"You have taken ample precautions, and I hope that we shall not be compelled to avail ourselves of them. If we can only throw the Regulators off our tracks this time, we are safe for ever. But good night; you had better lie down there upon the mattress. I will look to your horse in the meantime."

Rowson, quite fatigued, consented willingly, and soon nothing was to be heard but the deep breathing of the sleepers. All at once the loud shrill cry of an owl sounded in the stillness of the night. It was repeated several times, and Johnson rose, and stepped across the men lying in the middle of the room towards the door.

"Well, what are you creeping about for?" asked Rowson, indignantly, putting his hand to his arm, upon which Johnson trod in passing.

"Did you hear the owl?" asked Johnson, in a low voice.

"Well, bless me, are you going to hunt owls?" Rowson muttered. "You have no hens whose precious lives might be endangered."

"What!" cried Johnson, when the same sounds were again heard; "that's Atkins, sure enough. What can bring him down here in night and mist? Come in," Johnson exclaimed, stepping to the door—"come in; there are only friends here."

"Good evening, Johnson," said the broad-shouldered farmer, stepping over the little fence and approaching the door. "We are late guests, are we not?"

"*We!* what do you mean by *we?* Who have you brought here?"

"A friend; one that has *merchandize;* he wishes to be introduced to you. But who on earth is with you in the house?"

"Cotton and Rowson."

"Rowson!" exclaimed the stranger, who was well wrapped up in a large mantle—"Rowson!" and he stepped forward. "Eh! I should not have thought of finding an old acquaintance here this evening."

"An old acquaintance!" muttered Rowson, at the chimney-place, where he was busy endeavouring to make the embers burn up again—"an old acquaintance! Who can that be?"

"You know Rowson, do you?"

"Know him! how can you ask me such a question?" said the little man. "Does he preach still?"

"That he can best answer himself," said the Methodist, stepping forward, by no means in the friendliest of moods.

In his hand he held a flaming torch, and after examining the stranger for some time he at last recognised him, and exclaimed joyfully—"By my faith, Hokker, what on earth brings you back to Arkansas? Did the air grow too hot for you in Missouri? Welcome here, old boy! Only come in, or the wind will blow our torches out."

"We cannot stay long," said Atkins; "we have only stolen away secretly from home; but if——"

"Oh, don't you be speechifying," said Cotton, from the interior of the house; "time wont pass away more slowly before the door than it does inside, and there is a cold draught comes through the door."

There was nothing to be said against this. The men followed Rowson, who led the way with his torch to the chimney-corner, where the empty drinking vessels were scattered about.

"Have you anything left to drink?" asked Atkins, bending over the large iron kettle, and tilting it on one side. "Really, there isn't a drop left, as true as I am alive."

"Only wait a quarter of an hour," said Johnson, "and there shall be no lack of drink."

"No," Atkins cried, "we really must——"

"Well, go on, and say what you have to say. In the meantime, the water will boil, and then we will dispute the point."

"Well, Hokker, how do things look in Missouri?" asked Rowson, shaking him heartily by the hand.

"First of all, don't call me Hokker," said the stranger, laughing; "I am called Jones—John Jones—if anybody should ask you."

"Very good, very good," said Rowson; "it is all the same to me. But what brings you here?"

The little man, who must in former times have been an intimate friend of Rowson's, proceeded to relate that he had left Missouri on account of *some misunderstandings*, and had taken up his residence in Franklin and Crawford county, the most western parts of the State, where alone, according to what he said, was it possible to be at once in what he chose to call *business relations* with the white men as well as the Indians. At present some affair, in which he was a *partner*, had induced him to visit Yell county, since, owing to some *envious men*, the formerly favoured road down the Arkansas river had become dangerous. The little man further stated that he intended to remain at least for a few days in that part of the country in which the scene of our narration is laid, in order, on the one hand, to *let his traces grow cold*, on the other to get more intimately acquainted with the neighbourhood. It appeared that he liked it very much from having formerly resided there for some time. Rowson listened to his old friend with particular attention, and now and then, while he was speaking, nodded complacently. When he had ended, and Johnson was filling the cups with the drink he had just finished brewing, Rowson jumped up, held out his hand to Jones, and said—

"Will you join us? Will you at once play your part in the comedy we are acting here? Say, yes; and you will have to begin to-morrow."

"Why, to speak the truth, that has commenced already, and not very long ago," replied the stranger, smiling; "and as far as the comedy is concerned, I have acted with advantage in *pieces of intrigue* already. I made good use of the time I spent at New Orleans. However, be it as you say, if you think me fit for the undertaking; and it

will also be to our advantage—I mean to mine and that of my friends in the upper part of the State—I am your man. But what shall I have to do?"

"We will tell you all that presently," said Rowson, rubbing his hands with glee, and half-emptying a cup which Johnson offered him. "To-morrow the Regulators hold their meeting."

"If that is all the good news you have to tell me," said Jones, laughing, "you might have saved yourself the trouble. In fact, their vigilance is likely to be a reason why I should set off upon my journey much more rapidly than I had intended."

"Nay, that cannot be," said Rowson. "You must attend the meeting."

"I! well, I like that! it is rather a good idea," said Jones, with amazement.

"Yes, you," continued Rowson. "None of the settlers here know you; those who lived in this neighbourhood when you built Atkins's house are dead, or have emigrated, some time since. I myself thought of attending, but I should find it a much more difficult matter. In the first place, I can hardly spare the time; however, I should have strained a point to get at their intentions if you had not come; moreover, there are some people in this neighbourhood who do not like me, and I am sure my presence would act as a spell upon them; they would keep many things silent that would otherwise come out; with you it will be all right. I shall introduce you to young Brown. Mind, I shall introduce you as 'a Regulator from Missouri,' who has come to Arkansas in order to establish a connexion between his league and ours, that both States may unite their forces. You can assure him that this is the only way to put a stop to the robberies which, as far as horseflesh is concerned, threaten to ruin the industrious farmers of the backwoods."

"Splendid! splendid!" said Atkins, joyfully; "that's a capital plan!"

"But I do not know whether I have time," said Jones, thoughtfully, knocking the empty tin cup against his chair.

"Whether you have time?" replied Rowson; "why, could you employ your time better than by finding out and

defeating their plans? Were they carried out, the connexion between us and your friends would be rendered impossible, or, at least, so dangerous that no reasonable person would risk his neck on such a chance."

"That's true enough," said Jones, holding out his cup to be filled; "that is true, indeed; but will Brown believe me? I saw him to-night, and never told him that I was connected with the Regulators."

"You did not know that he was a Regulator, and you could not trust any stranger with such a secret."

"That's true again; but will the other Regulators trust *me?*"

"Don't be afraid on that point," said Johnson; "I heard some time ago that they meant to enter into communication with the surrounding counties, and so such an offer would just suit them."

"A spy! a real genuine spy!" said the Missourian, smiling, to himself; "and to be thrown regularly amongst the Regulators, like a violet amongst a bouquet of roses. That will be a very amusing adventure."

"Will you do what we propose?" asked Rowson.

"Of course," Jones replied. "I shall send some of them up the river, and others to various places. I shall make myself a good name, and whenever at some future time we mean to do a good stroke of business, we will send them all in a lump in the wrong direction, and—ha! ha! ha!—shall have the air pure. A splendid idea this!"

"Then you do not intend to go to the meeting to-morrow, Rowson?" Cotton remarked.

"No; it is no longer necessary that I should do so," replied the preacher.

"And how are we to know what their plans are?"

"If something important is decided upon," Rowson observed, thoughtfully, "Jones, who will at any rate return to Atkins's towards the evening, will let him know. Atkins can then send the mulatto up here with the information. As for myself, to-morrow morning I must finish some important business; and to-morrow night I shall spend at Roberts's. On Sunday morning, at nine o'clock, I will be at the cross oak—you know the tree I mean, Atkins, the one into which that branch has fallen in such a manner that it

looks like a cross. Very well, at that place I shall be sure to wait, and there you will send the mulatto. Whatever happens, you must send him. It may be possible that I shall have a message for you, and I should not have time to ride over here."

"Well, everything is now settled," said Atkins; "come, Jones, or they will miss us at home. There is an awful row at my house. The young 'un is ill, and Betsy has sent the mulatto and my workman in search of assistance. Three old women had arrived when we left, and I am quite persuaded that we shall have the place full by to-morrow. A similar thing happened once before."

"At all events, don't let Brown go away before I arrive," Rowson observed.

"No, don't be afraid; and mind you are not late, for though I may make the breakfast half an hour later, I shall not be able to detain him long."

The men wished one another good-night. Atkins and Jones sprang over the fence, and disappeared in the darkness. The others once more sought their couches to finish the night's rest which had been disturbed by the unexpected visit. Cotton muttered, as he wrapped his blanket round him, "If any one disturbs me again to-night, I shall garotte him—that much is certain."

In a few moments the dreadful noise he made in snoring proved how fatigued he was, and how much he stood in need of rest.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PIONEER FAMILY—THE NEW REGULATOR FALLS INTO THE SNARE.

THE boisterous gale that had been raging all night subsided, as if exhausted and fatigued, towards break of day. The first rays of the sun shone brightly on the tops of the lofty trees, and tinged the summits of the distant hills with their ruddy light.

The early cocks had already left off crowing, and strutted about with grave looks and heads erect, as if proud at having fulfilled their duty in making known to the neigh-

bours around that they were still alive. They paced gravely about the different farmyards, casting longing looks at the doors of the houses, waiting for some kind soul to appear with an armful of maize in order to feed the horses. The latter had been neighing impatiently, and trotting up and down near the fences for some time. The cunning fowls knew, of course, that they should get their share of the grains by hook or by crook. The geese gabbled, the dogs barked, the blue smoke ascended in clouds towards the tops of the pines, adorned with many millions of sparkling diamond dew-drops. Even the yellow river, which rolled along beneath the overhanging reeds and willows, seemed to flow more rapidly under the influence of the enlivening sunlight. In some parts it appeared to undermine the banks; at others to direct all its force against them, tearing away large pieces of soil and mighty trees.

Quite in harmony with this genial morning appeared a solitary horseman, who trotted along through the forest by a narrow road on a strong little pony, humming a gay tune, and only now and then spurring the spirited animal. Anxious not to arrive too late for the meeting, he had left home without having taken anything. It was Cook.

Suddenly and with astonishment he reined-in the animal he was riding, which, on account of the unexpected movement, jumped upon his hind legs and executed some wonderful evolutions, and then remained standing still and quiet, as a hunter ought to do, pricking his ears, seemingly not less astonished than his master, and listening to some sound not usual in such a place. A house was not to be met with in a circuit of three miles, and yet a loud crowing resounded from the middle of the wood just behind a thicket of holly and sassafras-bushes. It was a very gay and loud house-cock, and Cook looked around astonished and bewildered.

"I have not missed my road, I hope," he muttered to himself. "O dear me, no! I know every path or deer-track in the wood. New settlers! Well, that is hardly to be expected in this secluded place. Hallo! are not these wheel-traces beside the path? The rain has indeed almost obliterated them; but yes, truly, there they have crushed a bush, and here they have bruised the oak. They are evidently emigrants, so they will have some news to tell."

With a light pressure of his thigh he caused his pony to bound forward in the hope of overtaking the strangers. Neighing loudly, the animal seemed to wish thereby to give his master to understand with what eagerness he hurried on after the travellers.

In a few minutes Cook reached one of those camps of emigrants, which, especially in Arkansas, and on the road towards the Far West, or to Texas, are frequently met with. Two large tilted waggons formed the centre of the group, around which several pair of oxen, yoked and fastened together, were ranged. A little white-headed fellow, about eight or nine years old, was busily engaged putting pieces of maize-stalks into their mouths; while the animals, fixing their large good-natured eyes languidly and lazily upon the next piece which was coming to them, kept grinding with their strong teeth what they had in their mouths. With their long tongues, from time to time, they licked the hand of their young purveyor, as if to call his attention to the fact that they were ready for fresh supplies of food.

Five horses were grazing near at hand, in an excellent piece of reedland, tied together, and having bells round their necks; or, as the country term is, "hobbled." The emigrants themselves had evidently passed the night between the waggons, having no tent or shelter beneath which a man could have slept, while the rain was pouring down. They were squatting round what served them for a table. It consisted of deals laid upon the ground, being covered with a large sheet. This kind of breakfast-table harmonized well enough with the seats, which were of very rude contrivance.

The small family sat down quite in Turkish fashion. It consisted of husband, wife, two grown-up daughters, and three young lads; the eldest one or two and twenty, the younger, the child already mentioned, about eight.

"Come, Ben," cried the father to the little fellow, "the animals have had enough; they were in the reedland all night, and don't want any more feeding. Keep quiet, dogs! I wonder what's the matter with those animals. They have been barking and howling ever since midnight, because a wretched panther happened to pass somewhere in the neighbourhood. Down, I say!"

Notwithstanding this friendly admonition, the dogs, which

were fastened under the cart or waggon did not seem by any means inclined to obey the order, but barked still more violently, looking in the direction whence Cook was now approaching.

"Good morning to all," he cried, in a friendly tone, as, when about ten paces from the group, he sprang from the saddle and threw the bridle over the neck of his little pony; "good morning, and good cheer!"

"That we are just going to make," replied the head of the emigrant family. "Come and take some with us, if you have not yet breakfasted. Come, Anne, a mug for the gentleman. Fall to—help yourself."

"Thank you," said Cook, accepting the invitation without ceremony. "Why, this is a most lucky meeting. I could hardly expect to find such good company and such an excellent breakfast in the heart of the forest. Yes——" he looked round at his pony, which was grazing, but all the time kept looking with ears erect towards the waggon, in which Benjamin was nestling amongst the maize.

"Bring an armful of maize, Ben," cried the emigrant, perceiving his guest's movement. "You can put it into the iron pot which is standing there beside the cart. The pony wont mind what kind of vessel his meal is served in."

The animal seemed to give his assent to this proposition by a low neigh, and as soon as Ben had removed the saddle and bridle, set about doing honour to the meal placed before him.

"Where do you come from, sir?" said Cook at last, after a pause, of which all present had made good use in satisfying their appetites.

"From Tennessee, near the Wolf River."

"And where are you bound?"

"To Franklin County, at the foot of the Ozark Mountains."

"Got a place already?"

"Not yet, but I shall soon find something suitable; I have a brother over there."

"Hem! there is some capital land about here——"

"Yes, I know there is; but the folks on the Fourche-la-Fave are said to be too fond of horse-flesh."

"Ho, ho!" Cook exclaimed, laughing. "That's what the

people along the Arkansas have made you believe, is it? Things are not quite so bad as they are represented. Yet, to speak sincerely, the evil is bad enough. I am on my way to a meeting of the Regulators, and hope we shall soon put an end to that nuisance. Arkansas will no longer be permitted to enjoy the miserable distinction of being an asylum for highwaymen, thieves, and depredators of every kind."

"You say Arkansas," replied the farmer, laughing. "Yet, if you speak of the matter in the United States generally, even in Tennessee, or more to the north and east, it is true, people always attribute it to Arkansas. But if one crosses the Mississippi into Arkansas itself, then the *Fourche-la-Fave* is the word. You do enjoy a capital reputation in the country up about."

"I dare say," said Cook. "You must remember that they exaggerate enormously. Though there are some good-for-nothing fellows about, yet it would be the d—— I mean to say, we shall get rid of them. I wish you could be present at our meeting. After all, this is Saturday; and you will scarcely think of proceeding on your journey to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" the emigrant exclaimed; "oh, because it is Sunday? That makes no difference under the circumstances; I must avail myself of the fine weather, as I wish, if possible, to get hold of a piece of arable land, and hope to be able even yet to sow a few acres of Indian corn. You can well imagine that I have no time whatever to lose."

"No, you have not; I merely thought you might take an interest in getting acquainted with the laws of the Regulators."

"Yes, the matter does interest me," replied the Tennessee man. "Do you really mean to have recourse to Lynch-law? I heard so the other day, but could hardly believe it."

"We do, and it is necessary," replied Cook; "we are not yet quite sufficiently settled to deal with criminals in the ordinary way. Everything is in a transition state. At the same time, no State stands more in need of a regular administration of justice than this very Arkansas. Something must be done, if we don't intend to be ruined; or, as you say yourself, if we are not to get such a name in the other States that

no emigrants will venture to settle amongst us. Our land will become almost valueless, and nobody will be found to occupy it."

"I perceive what you mean," said the Tennessee man. "I see; we did the same thing five years ago, when Tennessee was a district. A lot of rascals had congregated together there; but a few yards of hemp, and vigorous prosecution of offenders, soon set matters to rights. Things are not even now in a very secure state on the other side of the Arkansas. As we were coming up the river in the beginning of the week, a farmer, who used to live there, was killed on his way home from the 'Indian nation,' where he had been selling pigs."

"I heard of the circumstance," said Cook, shuddering. "Has not the murderer been discovered?"

"No," replied the old man, angrily, striking the deal table with his fist. The blow was a violent one, and it made the salt-castor and other things upon the table dance. "No; and I only hope the pale-faced scoundrel may again come within reach of me while I have a rifle in my hand. Were I behind a tree, or even in the open plain, I will be hanged if I did not let the daylight enter into his skull—that much is certain."

"You know him, then?"

"No, I do not know him; yet I saw him—or, at least, I believe I did. In fact, I have no doubt it was the murderer. Our waggon was proceeding along the road, while I and my Ned here—my eldest son—had gone off the track a little, hoping to shoot some deer, for we had seen plenty of tracks, and had arrived at the head of a small lake. Ned went on one side, and I took the other, when I observed a small path which came from the thicket, and evidently led towards the main road, which we had just left, and on which our waggon had to pass, being at that time perhaps half a mile in the rear. All at once I heard something rustling among the bushes, and, thinking it was a stag or some wild turkeys, I stepped behind a tree. Two men on horseback suddenly appeared: the elder was dressed as our farming people generally are; the other was easily recognised by a broad-brimmed hat. They were engaged in close conversation, and passed me without taking any notice. I did not address them, as I wished to avoid

making any unnecessary noise that might have the effect of driving away the game. I had walked on slowly for perhaps a hundred paces, the travellers having meanwhile disappeared in the bushes behind, when I suddenly heard a shot in the direction in which I lost sight of them. At first I thought that my son Ned, unable on account of some thicket to find a clear path on the other side of the river, had fired off his rifle as a signal to me; but soon after my boy answered me from the opposite shore of the lake, and so I naturally concluded that the shot proceeded from some person hunting in the neighbourhood. Of course I took no further notice of the matter, but went on my way.

"It was late in the afternoon, and the same evening we were overtaken by people who told us of a murder which had just been committed. The dead man, they said, had been shot through the head. Neither of the two horsemen I had noticed passed my people's waggon. No sooner did I hear this, than I mounted my horse—the womankind kept crying most awfully—and galloped back as fast as my animal could go, until I reached a farmhouse, in which people told me the dead body was deposited. It turned out as I had anticipated. In the dead body I recognised one of the two men I had seen riding along the road that very day. The victim was the elder of the two. The man in the broad-brimmed hat must have been the murderer. I described him as well as I could; but none of the people present seemed to know him—nobody remembered having seen him upon the road. I remained two whole days in the neighbourhood; the murderer had disappeared, without leaving any trace. According to the calculations of those who knew how many pigs the unfortunate victim had taken, and what they were worth among the Indians, he must have had about a thousand dollars with him, all of which had, of course, disappeared.

"Yes, yes," said Cook, "such things are of too common occurrence in this neighbourhood—even more atrocious acts have been committed. Well, let us hope that we shall soon be able to crush the serpent's head. People on the other side of the Arkansas may also try to get rid of their *vermin*. By-the-bye, which route do you think of taking?"

"I do not myself know exactly: the road, I believe, stretches along by the side of the river."

"There is a road on each side, and that on the opposite side would, perhaps, be the best for you; for higher up, the passage through the river, especially with waggons, is rather difficult."

"In what manner shall I be able to cross best? How far are we from the next house?"

"The next house is Wilson's," said Cook; "and the next after that is Atkins's, about a mile and a half further on. I think you can get across at the first. There is a very good ferry-boat, and a broad, solid road down to the river."

"Is the ferryman's name Wilson?"

"No; Wilson resides there—but the ferryman's name is Curneales."

"I thank you for your information and advice. I think I shall do as you suggest; and if at some time or other you come near my place, you must not forget to inquire for old Stevenson, and you will always be welcome."

"Much obliged," said Cook, who had in the meantime got up and saddled his pony. "It is high time for me to be off, or I shall get behindhand, as I have several miles to ride. Good-bye."

With a hearty shake of the hand, the young farmer took leave of each member of the family, and soon after trotted away on his pony.

After riding for about an hour, he reached Atkins's door, where, to his astonishment, he found Brown, whom he imagined at his place of destination, or at least on his road thither. Brown stood at the side of his pony, which was saddled, and seemed to be engaged in close conversation with the stranger who had arrived the night before. Rowson in the meanwhile had made his appearance, and he introduced the stranger as an old acquaintance.

"Hallo, Cook!" shouted Brown, in great glee. "I am glad you are come. Now we can ride in company."

"Good morning, good morning," said Cook. "I thought you had been on the road long ago."

"It is my fault," said Atkins; "or rather my wife's—for she has been uncommonly long this morning getting the

breakfast. I suppose she could not help it; she was delayed by the child's illness."

"I should have ridden away long ago," said Brown; "but Mr. Atkins——"

"We could not let you go without having taken some refreshment," Atkins said, interrupting him. "No, I could never suffer that. Besides, you will still be in time, and delay has increased the company."

"I really think no time has been lost," said Brown, shaking his friend Cook by the hand. "Mr. Rowson," he continued, addressing the preacher, who had given his horse to the mulatto, "you are determined, then, not to come with us. I thought, when I saw you coming, that you wished to attend our meeting."

"I should like to be present at your meeting very much," replied the Methodist, "if urgent business did not prevent it. I have to celebrate my wedding to-morrow, and it is plain that, under the circumstances, I have plenty to attend to."

"No doubt," replied Brown, his voice being scarcely audible. "And this gentleman is, as you say, a Regulator? He did not speak of that last night."

"You will find that natural enough," replied Mr. Jones, with a bland smile, "if you consider that I was amongst strangers."

"It was most praiseworthy precaution. You were going to Fort Gibson, were you not?"

"I was; in fact, such is still my intention; but having met here, quite by chance, an old friend in Mr. Rowson, I intend spending a few days in the neighbourhood, and I should very much like to be present at the meeting of the Regulators to-day. Perhaps it will not be impossible to join our efforts with yours. It would be much easier for us to attain our common aim by joint efforts than alone."

"No doubt," replied Brown, looking earnestly at him, "and so you wish me to introduce you to the Regulators?"

"Such is my wish, and you would much oblige me——"

"I should also thank you for your interest in behalf of my friend," Rowson said, interrupting the speaker. "As I am just beginning housekeeping, he cannot come to stay with me immediately; but Mr. Atkins will, I believe, be kind enough to give him shelter to-night. The day after to-morrow I shall be able to offer him accommodation."

"Don't give yourself any trouble about it, Mr. Rowson," said Brown, smiling. "Mr. Jones will, I doubt not, stay some time with us: whether he will be pleased by his visit is another question."

"I am easily satisfied," replied Jones, apparently much delighted at the turn affairs had taken; "but had we not better mount and be off?—it is getting late."

"Mr. Jones's horse!" Atkins shouted to the mulatto, who stood in the doorway staring at the men.

"Listen, Brown—I don't half like that man's face," Cook whispered to his friend.

"When we reach Barill's, I must speak a few words with you alone," the other replied, in the same manner.

"Is there anything——"

"Hush! be quiet!—there will be plenty of time when we get there."

Jones had meanwhile mounted, and Brown was just stepping into his stirrup, when the mulatto led out two more horses, one of which was saddled for a lady.

"God bless me!" cried Cook; "another lady's saddle! I have just been counting those hung up there between the houses. They are no less than seven. This, then, is the eighth. What is the matter?"

"My goodwife has some visitors," said Atkins; "they came to see the sick child. But this saddle here is Ellen's; she is going to Roberts's."

At that moment the door opened, and Ellen came out, with her bonnet and shawl on, and a little parcel in her hand, which she gave to the mulatto. As she turned her face towards Brown, he saw that she had been weeping. She turned away quickly, mounted, and galloped down the road, followed by the mulatto.

"What is the matter with the girl?" Brown, with friendly sympathy, asked the master of the house, who was busily engaged cutting an uncommonly large quid of tobacco. The preacher continued to gaze after her, and, with a shake of his head, said, "I rather think her eyes looked as if she had been weeping."

"Oh, nonsense!" replied Atkins. "She did not like to leave the sick child; she said she should not see it again. And I believe my goodwife has had some words with her; she

does grumble sometimes, though she never means any harm. The stupid little thing has taken it to heart. She will be all right by-and-by, when she gets a good husband."

"Come along, Brown; what the deuce detains you?—time presses," cried Cook, impatiently.

"Yes, yes," Brown replied; "I only wish to say a few words to Mr. Rowson—a question——"

"He has gone into the house, and you can speak to him to-morrow, or even to-night. It will be noon before we get there; and the people have been expecting us these last four hours, I am sure."

"Very well, then; good-bye," replied the young man, nodding to those who stood near. He trotted rapidly away, followed by Cook and the stranger; and they all disappeared by the path which led into the forest.

CHAPTER XXV.

HARPER AND MARION—ELLEN ARRIVES AT ROBERTS'S.

THE sun shone brightly on Roberts's dwelling. The pine-trees and the oaks that grew around the field and the farm-yard cast showers of the bright dew which glistened on their leaves to the ground.

Four large, stately wild turkeys, bred from eggs found in the wood, strutted about proudly in the open space in front of the house, seemingly anxious, by a display of all their beauty, to deserve the maize-grains which Marion brought them in a little basket. On the little, low hickory-bushes which had been left near the dwelling for the sake of shade, the blue jays made a great noise, and the red cardinal birds fluttered about. Here and there, a merry silver-grey squirrel glided down some tree, leapt on the fence, ran along it, closely following its zigzag windings, and, frightened by some hen rustling in the leaves, swung itself up again upon the next tree, and on reaching the top, turned its little head slyly round and listened with erect ears in order to divine from what the suspicious noise below might proceed.

The two women were alone: Roberts went with his dogs into the forest at daybreak to look after his flocks, and

had promised to be back before dinner-time. Mrs. Roberts busied herself in an astonishing manner among the pots and saucepans. The pantry and the larder were looked through, and several boxes, glasses, and other vessels brought forth, containing honey and pickles. These were all produced in readiness for the great feast to be given at the wedding. To Marion the baking had been entrusted, and she was engaged kneading the dough with her tender and white hands into little flat biscuits, which were now ranged in long rows upon the table.

The two women were attired in the ordinary fashion of American backwoods-women. They wore garments of their own weaving. The stuff was of the most solid and durable kind; the colours and designs had been chosen with much taste: for Mrs. Roberts prided herself not to be outdone in that respect by any woman in Arkansas, "nor in the rest of the United States" either; though she admitted, not with less pride, that her daughter was almost her equal.

Marion had done up her hair in a plain and homely style. The only ornament she wore was a white rose-bud. She had just finished her work, and kept looking down the road silently, thoughtfully, her hands crossed before her, her little head leaning upon the well-polished door-post.

"Is he not coming yet?" asked her mother, holding up to her nose a stone jar with the air of a connoisseur.

"Who?" said Marion, startled as if in a fright, and turning quickly towards her mother.

"Who?" asked the latter, not observing her daughter's emotion,—"Who? silly girl! Sam, whom you yourself have sent down to Mr. Harper to invite him here to-day. Though, indeed, he does not deserve this special mark of attention. He might have made his appearance long ago!"

"Why, he has been ill, you know."

"At any rate, his nephew, who has now joined the Regulators, might have come. You have been unwell, too, and it would not have been more than polite to inquire respecting your health. He knows he is always well received here, and he has nothing whatever to do."

"He has been nursing his uncle," said Marion.

"Oh yes; I know you always take his part, ever since that affair with the——"

"—Panther," added the girl, blushing deeply, and, though speaking in an under-tone, almost with an accent of reproach.

"Well, he saved your life then, no doubt," said the old dame; "that, after all, is not more than any one else would have done in his place, and—— But I will say nothing against him, child: I do not object to him in any way; he is a well-disposed young man, and that's just why I am angry with him for not calling sometimes. The matter with Heathcott, indeed——"

"But, then——" her daughter said, in a tone of reproach, interrupting the old lady's speech.

"I know what you mean," her mother continued, without heeding the interruption. "If his conscience is so clear, why has he never made his appearance here? Mr. Rowson is quite of my opinion in this respect."

"Mr. Rowson is just the person who has every possible reason for defending Mr. Brown to the utmost of his power," exclaimed Marion, turning eagerly to her mother. "His conduct in this matter does not please me."

"He has defended him, too," her mother replied. "He took his part warmly, I assure you. But it is not his fault if he cannot entirely conquer his suspicion."

Marion turned aside, to hide a tear that stole into her eyes. Her mother was fully occupied getting various things ready for dinner, and did not observe her daughter's grief. Stepping to the little window cut in the logs, which, rather contrary to Arkansas fashion, boasted of a pane of glass, she observed three horsemen approaching. They turned out to be Harper, Bahrens, and the negro boy who had been sent for them.

"Good gracious!" cried Mrs. Roberts; "here comes Mr. Harper already, and I have not done yet. Oh, that rogue of a boy! did I not tell him to say twelve o'clock?"

"Never mind, mamma," said Marion, smiling, and secretly wiping away the tears from her eyes. "The two men are not particular about that; they are good friends of father's, and I should think Sam met them on the road."

The matter could not be helped; so Mrs. Roberts, as quickly as possibly, put her bonnet straight, adjusted her apron and dress, and went to meet her guests. Her

face looked rather hot, but there was a kind expression upon it.

"Welcome, Mr. Harper—you are as welcome as if you had returned from the dead," said she, holding out her hand. "Come in, gentlemen; my goodman will soon be back again; he only went to look after some cows that have not come home to be milked for some time. Come in, Mr. Bahrens. You must excuse my not being quite dressed."

"Mrs. Roberts," said Bahrens, "I am afraid I am encroaching, coming uninvited. I only heard as I was on my way that you had company."

"I thought you were going to the meeting of the Regulators," replied Mrs. Roberts, "otherwise I would have sent for you. But do come in; we must not settle these matters in the doorway."

The two men obeyed her invitation. Harper, though he still looked very pale as if suffering, had recovered all his wonted good-humour, which made him a general favourite. Being rather tired, he sat down, and took a glass of a nice restorative which had been prepared expressly for him. He then related how he had fared during his illness, who had come to nurse him, what kind of physic he had taken, and how he had recovered. He answered to all possible inquiries with amiable alacrity, and was lavish of his commendations of his nephew and his three neighbours, Wilson, Cook, and Roberts, who had taken so great an interest in him. "Even Bahrens," he said, holding out his hand to him, "left his maize-field and came over to me for a few days. They all were kind to me, and what more can I want here in the forest?"

Conversation now turned upon subjects in which all were immediately interested; that is to say, upon all manner of vegetables and other eatables. Mrs. Roberts looked among her knives for a particularly sharp one, which, she said, she wanted to go into the garden to cut some salad.

Bahrens, who had made the best use of his time by telling stories of fabulously large asparagus and incredibly thick cabbage-heads, insisted on accompanying her, and Harper remained with Marion in the house.

Although the young girl had been longing all the morning to have a few minutes' quiet conversation with Harper, in

order to speak of their friend, as he was the only person to whom she could speak freely, when this wish was really fulfilled she hesitated and felt uncomfortable. It seemed to her as if all the blood from her heart was rushing up to her temples and cheeks; her tongue appeared to be glued to her throat, and she could not utter a word. Harper, too, was silent. Both evidently were thinking of the same thing, but were afraid to touch upon a subject so delicate and so painful; yet, on the other hand, they could not converse upon any indifferent topic. At last Harper broke the silence, which had become painful. Taking the young girl's hand, he said, in a sad but kind tone of voice—

"How are you getting on, Marion? Well, I hope; are you not? I am glad, very glad, to find you looking so well and contented. You are a good, noble girl,—you are. Mr. Rowson," he continued, as Marion still kept silence,—"Mr. Rowson is a good man, and will do everything to render you as happy as you deserve to be. That—the boy, I mean —after all, is but young; and, you see, it is perhaps better so.—He has joined the Regulators now," he continued, after a pause, understanding the inquiring glance cast at him by the beautiful girl. "He only wants to try whether he can find out the real murderers. It would be a good thing to have the fellows hanged."

"He is not guilty, is he?" asked the girl, with an anxious look.

"Guilty?" said Harper, starting; "is there any one who thinks him guilty? I do not believe that you do," he added, taking her white hand and patting it in a friendly manner. "Not you; but other people shall also be convinced. I myself at one time was almost inclined to believe it. I knew that his blood runs high; but the fact that the money was taken startled me. Afterwards it turned out that my nephew on that very day wore his mocassins, and the tracks were those of boots or shoes. No, he has no blood upon his head. I hope that some chance or other will lead to the discovery of the real criminal."

"That's the reason why the Regulators are assembled, is it not?" asked the young woman.

"Well, they, too, are but men," said old Harper, with a shake of his head; "they are not even Indians. I wish

Asscwaum had remained with us! The rogue went away slyly, quite slyly—quite Indian-like, and has never been heard of since. Bill always declares that he will come back."

"Mr. Rowson said, a short time since, that the sly way in which the Indian went away speaks against him," said Marion.

"Oh! I wish Mr. Rowson would be a little more cautious with his suspicions," cried the old man, eagerly. "It is not proper to charge a man with such a horrible deed, though he be only an Indian. I would wager my head that he had nothing to do with it."

"Does Mr. Brown still intend to go to Texas?" whispered Marion.

"Yes," answered Harper, growing sad and grave. "I cannot get that extravagant idea out of his head, and think if they discovered the murderer to-day he would be off to-morrow. Has he bought the horse of your father yet?"

"That's what made me ask," said Marion. "I heard my father say this morning that he was going to catch the chestnut horse which generally grazes up in the valley, for Mr. Brown. I am exceedingly sorry to be the cause of driving him away from you."

"It was to be so, dear Marion," said the old man, standing up and kissing her on the forehead; "and it is, I suppose, for the best that things have turned out thus—who can tell? Therefore, cheer up, my dear girl, and do your best."

He took her by the arm, raised her face to his, and tried to look cheerfully and carelessly into her eyes; but his voice began to falter, and he had a hard struggle to contain himself.

At this juncture Mrs. Roberts returned from the garden with Bahrens. Although the good dame kept laughing, yet it was not without a certain degree of repugnance, because she felt convinced that Mr. Bahrens was relating things that could not be possible, how much soever she might be disposed to believe what he said. Bahrens, on his part, stuck to what he said, offered to prove his statements, and called Harper as a witness to the truth of his most extraordinary tales.

They were engaged in this half-serious, half-jocular dis-

cussion, when two horses stopped before the house, and Ellen entered, followed by the young mulatto.

The two girls were old acquaintances, and, consequently, greeted each other with great cordiality. Mrs. Roberts also received the orphan with much kindness, Rowson having told her—the truth for once—so much that was good of her: he had also mentioned that her foster-mother, Mrs. Atkins, treated her more like a slave than an adopted child.

Harper did not know Ellen, but Bahrens had seen her frequently.

She inquired kindly of her new mistress, or rather friend, whether she had come in time, stating that she had been a little delayed at home.

"Quite early enough, my dear child," said Mrs. Roberts, "quite early enough. We shall ride over to your new home to-morrow. Many things will still be required, for it cannot be supposed that a bachelor could succeed in getting his house arranged properly. Afterwards we shall call upon the judge, where Mr. Rowson will preach in the afternoon, and be married afterwards. In the evening we will bring them home; and you, my dear girl, will remain with them, together with our negro boy, whom you may keep to help you for about a fortnight."

This affair was soon settled, and the more serious and important business of the dinner engrossed the attention of the ladies. But neither Rowson nor Roberts made their appearance, and Mrs. Roberts began to grow impatient. Bahrens, after repeated requests, had sounded the horn for the second time. The notes were carried afar through the wood, and were at last answered by Roberts's hunting-cry in the distance. Soon his merry messengers, or heralds, the pack of hounds, came barking along the road. A few minutes afterwards, Roberts and Rowson were seen trotting towards the house.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MEETING OF THE REGULATORS—JONES IN A DISAGREEABLE SITUATION—PLOT AND COUNTER PLOT.

On that memorable morning, around Barill's small dwelling a goodly number not only of the neighbours, but also of such settlers as lived at a certain distance, had assembled. None were, however, allowed to enter the house, in which two corpulent negro women, borrowed for the occasion from a neighbouring mill that belonged to a prosperous man in Little-rock, were working vigorously. They were getting breakfast ready for such of the guests as had come from some distance; and at the same time they were making the necessary preparations for dinner. A good-sized kettle, suspended on a stick placed across two clothes-props, boiled fast, that they might always have a good supply of hot water ready. This was necessary, now and then, to counteract the cool morning air with a hot and spicy beverage.

Though the cup which generally brought so much joy and liveliness among the "men of Arkansas" went round their circle pretty freely, yet an almost solemn gravity seemed to have chained the tongues of most of them. Under a noble, wide-spreading tree stood the Regulators. Attention and firm decision were visible upon their dark, sunburnt faces. They had collected round a man who, with lively gestures and fluent tongue, seemed to be imparting to them something very interesting.

He was one of those half-whites, half-Indians, whose dark face cast suspicion upon his descent, reputed low even in the backwoods, and brought on him the name of a "Canadian Frenchman," a "Half-Indian," or the common nickname "Jumbo." He was telling the men around that he had come from the nation of the Cherokees, following the tracks of horses which had been stolen from him and from a friend. He declared that he had traced them to within about five miles from the spot upon which he was standing, but there he had lost the trail. Quite disgusted, he had already started off on his way home, when he heard of the meeting

of the Regulators, and thought it would be well to ride over in order to give them a description of his animals, that they might not be taken away or sold so easily.

The Canadian—for he himself gave himself out to be a Canadian—was a little, stout man, with long glossy hair, dark fiery eyes, ivory teeth, and prominent cheeks, after the Indian fashion: his large nose was rather crooked. His dress was that of the civilized Indians; and even the belt he wore was made of red wool, embroidered with beads, and decked with claws of panthers and bears.

The Regulators remarked that it was very strange that most of the tracks should lead into their neighbourhood, and then disappear in an unaccountable manner. During this conversation, Brown, Jones, and Cook rode up, and were warmly received by those before the hut. Shortly afterwards Harfield approached from another direction. First of all, he took breakfast, declaring he had ridden that morning fifteen miles without having broken his fast.

When he had done, and approached the circle of his friends, for whose benefit the Canadian was repeating his tale, Jones began to take a part in the conversation. He asked the half-Indian whether among the horses that had been stolen there was not a white one with one black leg.

The stranger eagerly answered in the affirmative.

"Then I saw them," said Jones, striking his right fist in the palm of his left hand; "hang me if I have not seen them!"

"But where?" asked the other, sharply.

"About fifteen miles from this. It was late last night, upon the ridge of the hill which divides the waters of the Mamell from those of this river."

"In what direction were they going?" asked the other, eagerly. "Were they upon the open road, or——"

"They were crossing the road just as I was climbing up that steep hill from the other side," replied Jones.

"How many men were with them?"

"Only one; at least, as far as I could see."

"That was them!" exclaimed the Canadian, joyfully. "A farmer on the border also saw them; but he could not tell me about the man, having been too far off. But where shall I find the trail?"

"Why, I am afraid, rain and wind will have washed all traces out," said Jones, thoughtfully; "but when you reach the summit of the mountain, the last houses you pass being called Greathouses, ride along the ridge for about four or five miles; and if you find nothing to the left, I think you had better go to the bank of the Arkansas, which flows almost past there, and ask about the blockhouses there. That will be all you can do."

"Then I wont lose any time," said the stranger. "Thank you for your information and advice. Good-bye, gentlemen."

Without more ado, the Canadian was about to mount his horse in order to pursue the thief, when Brown seized him by the sleeve of his leathern hunting-shirt, and said to him, as he looked up in amazement—

"Spare us another half-hour. The hints given you are very uncertain, and will take you a good deal of time. You can stay with us a little while longer. Besides, your horse seems very much fatigued, and wants rest; if in an hour's time you still think fit to pursue the trail, I will lend you mine, which is quite fresh, and will soon enable you to make up for the time you lose by staying."

"Suppose the fellow should get a boat to take him across the river?" said Jones.

"There's no danger of that; there are not many steamboats yet upon the Arkansas. You will wait a little, and then take my pony?"

The half-caste nodded with his head, quite satisfied. He accepted Brown's invitation to the breakfast-table still more eagerly than he did his advice. He declared he had not broken his fast since the morning before, and, to the dismay of the negro woman, attacked the viands and beverages in a most ferocious manner.

"Gentlemen," said Brown, addressing the rest of the meeting, "in the first place I have to introduce a stranger to you, who has been recommended to me by Mr. Rowson, and who wishes to make our acquaintance, being a Regulator from the Missouri. He hopes to establish a connexion between us and the Northern States. He also wished to be present at our meetings, in order to see how they are carried on. Is it not so, Mr. Jones?"

Jones bowed assent.

"As he has commenced," continued Brown, "by helping to set upon the right road one who wanted assistance, and who has applied to us for aid, I believe that he wants no further recommendation to be admitted to our otherwise secret meeting—don't you think so?"

"That is quite sufficient," cried the men. Harfield stepped forward and saluted the new-comer. He expressed his joy at the prospect of being brought into connexion with a brother-state, which would be desirable in many respects.

"What do you wish to say, Brown?" asked Cook of his friend, who had stepped with him aside.

"Watch that man closely, and do not let him be away for a minute," said Brown, in a whisper; "he is one of the band. Hush!—no more words about it. You may tell Wilson; and mind you both have an eye upon him. Have you your revolver ready? I now want, first of all, to get those negroes out of the way. I do not trust the rascals; they would give the alarm."

"That's all a lie, then, about his having seen the horses?" asked Cook.

"Hush! he is looking in this direction," said Brown, in a whisper. "He must not know that he is discovered. Take Wilson aside, and try to get the eating over, that we may get those negroes out of the way."

The men were standing about in groups. Jones was engaged in a private conversation with the Canadian about some questions of detail connected with the stolen horses, and Cook again approached Brown, saying—

"I don't know how to get rid of those deuced negroes. They are expected to remain here all day. What is to be done, must therefore be done quickly. I will take care that the blackies don't run away and spread the news all over the neighbourhood."

"Have you spoken to Wilson?" asked Brown.

"Yes; don't be afraid; he is sure not to get away. That will be a capital stroke we are going to do. But I see the proceedings are about to begin."

Harfield approached Brown, and asked him whether they ought not to enter into discussion at once, as several of those present seemed anxious to get home again as soon as

possible. Brown took him aside, and told him, in as few words as possible, his suspicion—yea, his conviction—that the stranger was, if not a downright thief, at any rate a very cunning and dangerous accomplice.

"And what do you mean to do?" asked Harfield, quickly.

"I shall speak of that presently, said Brown, in a whisper. "I am only afraid of the negroes, in case we have to take any steps against him. Who knows in whose pay they may be?"

"A plague upon it! you are right," said Harfield. "I really think I saw the stranger making signs to one of the negroes. Treason might ruin us altogether. But stop, I can manage it. Barill knows his own people; I will speak to him about it. In the meantime, put off any decisive measures until you see me come forward and take off my hat. Away! Jones is approaching. I guess he wont like seeing two of us speaking together."

Harfield went away; and Brown, as chief of the Regulators, opened the proceedings in a truly Arkansian fashion. He stepped on the stump of a felled tree, in order to see and be seen better. He addressed the meeting upon the business of the day, and referred to the legal objections to their association. He wound up by asking them whether they were still firmly resolved to carry out the illegal part of their proceedings by Lynch-law, and to punish even with death those who, in the opinion of the majority of the Regulators, deserved such punishment. A loud and thundering *Yes* was the reply, and bore testimony to the resolution of the members.

Brown observed that Barill had, in the meantime, been speaking to two young fellows, who separated themselves from the rest; the one taking his stand on a trunk of a tree exactly opposite the door. He then commenced a very close examination of the lock of his rifle; while the other, holding his horse ready saddled, stood beside him, conversing.

"Well, massa," said one of the negro women to those two men, taking a basketful of chips from the hands of a black boy of about twelve years of age, and strewing them before the door of the house, "do you not wish to hear what the masters have to say?"

"I am too young, Lyddy," replied he, laughing; "am not handsome enough: only handsome people may listen to it."

"O golly!" said the negro woman, "nonsense, massa. Massa Hostler over there——"

"Who, Lyddy?"

"Oh, massa! Massa Hostler there," replied the black woman, evidently with embarrassment, — "Massa Hostler also not very handsome. What has massa with his gun? All right?"

"You don't understand, Lyddy, that when an army is camping anywhere, posts are put out."

"O golly—golly!" cried the black woman, laughing, until her eyes almost came out like two large white balls; and two rows of white shining teeth, of which a shark need not have been ashamed, became visible. "Sentries before the kitchen door. O golly—golly!"

The young men joined in the laughter, and had their fun with the two negro women. While washing up the kitchen-things in the interior of the small house, and superintending the cooking that had begun afresh, they stepped from time to time into the doorway, and seemed to show a particular interest in what was going on in the circle of the men not far off.

"We have, then, come here together, my friends," continued Brown, "to remove the evil which has given us a bad name in all the States of the Union. We will indeed make a firm and a bold stand against those open enemies. It is more difficult to act against those who creep in amongst us under the mask of friendship: they flatter us and shake hands with us in daytime, though at night they hold intercourse with the robbers.

"But how are we to find them out? you will say—how are we to strip the mask from their faces? It is difficult, no doubt; but there is a Power above which sometimes places evidence in our hands in the most extraordinary manner."

At this stage of the proceedings, Harfield approached, took off his hat, and wiped his forehead.

"You may call it accident or fate," continued Brown, observing him, "that revealed such a secret to me; and now,

comrades, I hope that we have got upon the right scent, and shall turn out the wolf."

"Where? Found what? What have you discovered, Brown? Who is it? Is it any one here in the settlement? Is it one of the Fourche-la-Fave men?" exclaimed the different Regulators.

Jones, who had been leaning against a tree quietly enjoying what he thought the success of his stratagem, turned his head towards the house to ascertain whether, in the worst, his retreat still lay open. He met Cook's glance. The Regulator was standing close at his side, a little back, and said to him, in a whisper—

"Well, how do you like that? You could not have come at a more appropriate time. They will be astonished in Missouri when they hear that, wont they?"

"Yes, it seems very favourable," said Jones—"very favourable indeed. I—I am very curious——" He turned his head in another direction, and perceived Wilson, who was leaning against a tree, apparently quite indifferently. "—I am very curious indeed to know who is meant by that. It's a pity that I do not know the people in the neighbourhood."

"Oh, you may make their acquaintance by-and-by," replied Cook; "but, listen."

"Immediately," Brown answered those who asked these questions. "Immediately; you shall know everything presently. Chance—we will, then, call it so—gave me, a few weeks ago, a clue,—under what circumstances I shall afterwards state. I did not at the time understand the value of what I had discovered; it has, however, become clear to me since. It was an agreement between two honourable men—a method by which one of their company could make himself understood to another by means of words and signs, though they might be entire strangers."

"Do you want anything?" Cook said to Jones, as the latter seemed anxious to get to the outer portion of the circle.

"Only a glass of water," Jones replied, in a whisper. "I shall be back in a moment."

"Lyddy, a glass of water for Mr. Jones," said Cook, in so loud a voice that all turned round and gazed at him with astonishment.

Brown paused in his address, with a smile, and Jones turned pale as death. The black woman, who had been waiting for an opportunity to come nearer to the men, and especially to the spot where Jones stood, quickly served a mug of water, and, as quickly as her corpulence would permit, advanced towards the tree where he stood.

He thanked her, took the mug, and drank. He availed himself of the opportunity to whisper a few words to the negro woman, and to keep stationed outside of the circle. Wilson came forward, and standing close to the stranger, opposite Cook, also asked the negro woman for a drink. Brown at a glance comprehended the state of affairs, and continued—

"A question as to the situation of the Fourche-la-Fave —a question as to the state of the pasture-grounds in the neighbourhood—and a request for a glass of water;—these were the signs. Who, think you, is the traitor amongst us?"

At this moment Lyddy came from the kitchen with a little basketful of maize, and went to the stranger's horse and put the reins over. This was just while all present were listening in breathless silence for the name of the traitor and criminal. Cook observed the movement on the part of the negro woman.

"Gentlemen," said the leader of the Regulators, raising his voice, "I was last night in the house of our neighbour Atkins, and he is the traitor."

"A strange affair, that," said Cook, in an under-tone, to Jones, leaning his arm on his shoulder, as if in great confidence,—"A very strange affair that, isn't it?"

Jones looked into his face with staring eyes and ashy cheeks. He felt that he was betrayed; he felt that Brown's eye was fixed upon him, though he did not dare to look up. He knew there was no safety for him but in rapid flight, and that he must get off in the best manner he could. He placed his right hand under his waistcoat, feeling for his bowie-knife, and cast a glance at the negro woman, who had just finished her preparations. All this was the work of but a few moments. At Brown's last words, a murmur of astonishment and indignation burst from the assembled Regulators.

"But that scoundrel," continued Brown, in a low voice, stretching out his arm towards the stranger—"that scoundrel, who, with his thievish tricks, under the cover of night, has

crept into our settlement—yea, even amongst us—has had the audacity to introduce himself as a 'Regulator from the Missouri;'—it is that fellow."

All turned round in terror and indignation towards the man pointed out. Jones drew his broad knife from its sheath, and raised it over his head in order to cut his way out. Those near him, who had not, of course, in the least expected such a movement, drew back frightened. Wilson, from the moment he had seen the stranger's hand under his waistcoat, perceived his design, and completely understood his plan. The steel had hardly flashed in the hand of the traitor, when Wilson seized his arm with an iron grasp. At the next moment, the spy, knocked down by the powerful fist of his antagonist, lay under him struggling in vain against his assailant. A wild astonishment—a strange feeling of surprise—had at first rendered the men almost unfit for action. This kind of prostration lasted but for a moment, and all their powers were soon called into play, as it became necessary for them to take measures for their safety.

"Stop the negro!" Brown cried, as soon as he saw that the spy had been secured. He had been looking round very carefully, and he was just in time. As his eye glanced over the assembly, he perceived the light jacket of the negro boy, who, serpent-like, glided into the thick bushes. It was evident that he wished to get away, in order to warn the other confederates of the turn which affairs had taken. One of the Regulators, however, who had been stationed as a sentinel, kept his eye upon the young fellow. Something in hid demeanour had from the first excited his suspicions. Just as the negro was about to disappear in the thicket, the young man sprang into his saddle, put spurs to his little spirites animal, which bounded like a hurricane over the trunks of felled trees that lay across the road, and he came up with the negro in a few seconds.

The negro boy, perceiving that his retreat was cut off, crouched down upon the ground, and begged for mercy in supplicating tones. He promised not to run away—that he would not stir even a step from the house.

The two fat negro women also appeared perfectly paralysed, and did not attempt to set a foot out of the house; they certainly would not have had much chance of escaping by

means of flight. The little building in which the three black prisoners were confined was surrounded by several sentries. They did not, however, treat their charge harshly, but kept urging them not to allow their despair to cause them to neglect the necessary preparations for dinner.

Jones had in the meantime been secured, and he was led into the circle of the men. He stood with downcast eyes, and obstinately refused to answer any questions.

"Put on the hickory," cried several in a breath. "Curse the dog! bind him to a dogwood-tree,* and let him peel the bark!—hang him up by his hands, and set the dogs at him!" were the friendly suggestions made for the benefit of the victim. Pale and bound, with his teeth clenched spasmodically, he stood among the Regulators, apparently expecting some extreme measure, which he did not, however, seem to fear.

Several of the more uncivilized backwoodsmen were about to put their threats into immediate execution; and one was busying himself taking off the bark of a papao-tree, to serve as a rope for fastening the prisoner to the dogwood-tree.

Brown interfered, in order to restrain them from acting so hastily, and said—"Stop! Leave that man alone. As long as there is any chance of our attaining our aim without such means, it is always better to defer making use of them. Atkins remains to be dealt with. He is sure to know more of the crimes committed in this neighbourhood than this fellow. I am quite positive that he and Atkins were entire strangers until the evening before last."

"Then, it is all a lie about his having seen my horses, and he only wanted to send me upon a fool's errand into the Mamell mountains," said the half-caste man, stepping forward, with an angry brow.

Brown checked him, and said—"He is certain to have

* The dogwood-tree is a kind of wild cornelius cherry, with bitter, unpalatable berries. The bark may be easily peeled off. This tree abounds in Arkansas. It rarely attains to more than from three to five inches in diameter. It was very frequently made use of by the Regulators, as well as by overseers of slaves, as a stake. The poor wretches writhing under the castigation often strip the tree of its bark. Hence has arisen the proverbial expression in Arkansas—"to let a person peel dogwood bark," —meaning to flog him.

seen your horses; for I have not the least doubt that he is the very man who brought them here."

"A plague upon——"

"Stop!" continued Brown, taking the angry man by the shoulder; "they are here. Atkins cannot have sent them away yet, although he probably meant to do so yesterday."

"Let us search his place at once," cried Harfield. "If we find the animals there, then we shall have proof positive."

"I am afraid our search would not be successful," said Brown. "I was in his farmyard this morning, and closely observed its arrangements. If he has the horses in his keeping, they are certainly not within his fences, and there must be some secret place upon his grounds—most likely in the reed-valley—where the horses are concealed. They may be screened by the tall and thick reeds—perhaps, also, by some trees cut down for that special purpose."

"The entrance to this hiding-place must, however, be from his house," cried Cook, impatiently.

"No doubt," replied Brown; "at least, I cannot imagine any other way in which it could be contrived. But it is all the same; no judge will hold him responsible for animals running free in the forest."

"A truce to the judges and their Courts," said Smiers, stepping forward. "We did not meet together here to ask what the Courts would say in the matter. A truce to them! I say again. We will support our own rights; and when we are convinced that what we are doing is proper and just, let us care but little what others think about it. That's the reason why we made you our chief; and if you don't like to undertake the responsibilities, you have only to say so, and another will be chosen in your stead."

Brown was about to reply, when Harfield interfered, and attracted the attention of the assembled Regulators. Turning to his friends in general, and more particularly to the last speaker, who seemed to have the majority with him, he said—

"Gentlemen, you all know me, and probably none of you suppose that I lack enthusiasm in this good cause. Mr. Brown, however, is right. It is not sufficient for us to know that Atkins is an accomplice, and that he has received and secreted the stolen animals; we must discover whether

he still follows these evil practices, and in what manner he effects his object.

"Evidently he must have accomplices. Just bind that boy, if he attempts to stir, or to set his foot out of the block-house," continued Harfield, pointing to the young negro, who was at that moment gliding towards the doorway. "You must take better care of the fellow, or he will spoil all the fun; he meditates mischief. I have heard," he continued, after this admonition to the sentinels, who, in the interest they took in the matter, somewhat relaxed in their vigilance —"I have been told that Atkins seldom or ever leaves his house; he must consequently have people to assist in these evil practices, and they cannot live at any great distance from his place."

"Johnson has a kind of a cottage at a very short distance from his house," said Wilson.

"Perdition on that wretch!" Harfield exclaimed, forgetting his previous resolution of remaining unmoved. "Then, that rascal plays the same game, and we were after all deceived by him when we rode after the horses and overtook him with his lot. A plague upon him! Wait a moment," he continued, after a short pause; "in this case, vigilance and patience will accomplish more than frantic violence. I am of Brown's opinion, that it will be better to give the affair our serious and mature consideration, and not to act rashly, and perhaps foolishly. We have several hours for deliberation, and then we can come to some determination. Brown will perhaps be good enough to let us know what plan he has to propose."

"With great pleasure," said Brown, mounting the rude rostrum once more. "My plan is easily told, and as easily understood. We know how to obtain admission to our neighbour's hiding-place. He can have no idea that we have got a clue to his secret; and as that is now our secret, my proposal is, that we should send somebody to Atkins—a person, mind you, that he does not know: this Canadian, perhaps, would be just the man—and he can take some horses there."

The half-caste man shook his head. "No, that wont do," he said. "I was there this morning at break of day. He

did not see my horse, it is true, as I left the animal outside; but he saw me. There was a lot of women——"

"That's awkward. Well, then, we shall have to find another person to go in your place. He can make use of the watchword, receive his instructions, and discover all their schemes by taking the horses he has with him to the place Atkins points out. By that means we shall know everything. In the meanwhile, we must be in ambush close at hand, and at a given signal rush forward."

"That's all very well," Wilson said; "but where are we to find, and by this evening, a person whom Atkins does not know? Why, he is acquainted with almost everybody in Arkansas."

"What were you doing at Atkins's place?" Harfield asked the Canadian.

"I went there to ask about the horses I had lost."

"And what was his answer?"

"That he had not seen any."

"Well, that was a lie, at any rate. It will, however, be a difficult job to meet with a person whom he does not know. Does he know you, Kefner?"

"I should think so," replied the individual addressed; "he has known me these five years."

"And you, Jenkins?"

"He knows me as well as he does his nearest neighbour."

"And you, Williams?"

"He knows them all, Mr. Brown," said the man last addressed. "We must try some other plan. If we could only find out the road——"

"Stop!" cried Cook; "I have got it—an excellent idea! The old man wont mind the delay of a day or two; we can supply him with food for his family, and provender for his cattle."

"Of whom are you speaking?" several of the men exclaimed in a breath.

"Did you not notice, this morning, a waggon crossing the river at your ferry, Wilson?" asked Cook.

"I have been here ever since last night," the young man replied, with a blush. "But what about that?"

"The people with that waggon cannot be, at the furthest,

more than two miles from the other side of the river," replied Cook. "He is an old Tennessee-man, with his family. The father, or one of the sons, must aid us in this business. Atkins does not know them; and if we manage everything carefully, the old fox may be caught."

"Who can we send after them?" asked Wilson; "and will the pursuer have much chance of finding them?"

"Oh, nothing can be easier," replied Cook. "Get over the river, cut across the plain on the left-hand side, ride past the lake, and when you have reached the road, look for the tracks of a cart. If the emigrants have got over, you must overtake them in a very short time; and if they have not crossed, so much the better, for in that case you will come up with them on your way down to the river."

"Don't you think it would be much better," said Brown, "if you were to go yourself? It seems that you have already made acquaintance with the old man, and you can prevail upon him to do what we require more readily than anybody else."

"I will go if you deem it necessary," Cook replied: "I shall not stand in the way of the accomplishment of our plans. I really think it will not be a very difficult matter to obtain the old man's assistance; in fact, I believe he wont even leave it to his sons, but will go himself."

"Well, then, that point is settled," said Curtis, laughing and rubbing his hands. "I really believe we shall in the end discover the villains—who will pay dearly for their depredations; they shall get a taste of hemp that will last them a long time. But what are we to do with our prisoners in the meanwhile? I rather suspect that negro. The wretched blackie has twice endeavoured to sneak away; and I have not the slightest doubt that, were he free, he would go straight to Atkins."

"We must bind them hand and foot," said Brown; "for we cannot expose ourselves now to the risk of being betrayed."

"The negresses, too?" asked Wilson.

"The lad, at any rate," Harfield answered. "As to the two women, a watch will be sufficient; and if the boy makes the slightest attempt to escape, bind him to a dogwood-tree, and teach him to dance. Where is the papao-bark?"

"You had better use a rope," Barill suggested; "there is one under the bed, in the corner. Is Jones well secured?"

As he uttered these words, he stepped up to the prisoner in order to examine his bonds, when the Missourian—who, in some extraordinary manner, had succeeded in freeing his hands—sprang away from the tree to which he had been made fast, and set off to the forest as fast as his legs would carry him. He did not run far. Though Barill drew back—not so much from fear as surprise—Wilson, who was hardly ten paces behind him, overtook him after a sharp chase. The culprit, perceiving this to be his last chance, prepared to resist his pursuer; though the latter was of a much more powerful frame, and tried to grapple with him, making use of fists and teeth in the fury of despair.

Wilson was obliged to exert all his skill, and at last a powerful blow brought his exasperated antagonist to the ground. He was bound hand and foot, and carried into the house, which was guarded by four men armed with loaded rifles in order to prevent his escape. Cook saddled his little pony, and trotted towards the river in pursuit of his acquaintances of the morning. Brown and Harfield placed sentinels in all directions to cut off the connexion with the other settlements, and to prevent any one getting away to warn Atkins of the state of affairs. The other Regulators took care that dinner was prepared, whilst, collected in groups, they reposed under the shade of the trees which had been left standing at intervals in the clearing. They consulted about their plan for the evening while they rested in order to refresh their exhausted frames.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE RETURN FROM THE MEETING.

In the wild forests of the West, in which the abodes of the few settlers are often separated by wide and rugged tracts, people more fully appreciate the value of having good neighbours. They not only maintain friendly relations with each other in a general manner, but they also help and assist one

another in cases of need; for there are many circumstances in this kind of life in which the individual farmer could do but little without the aid of his fellows. Such are, the ploughing of the virgin soil—the collecting into a heap the large trunks of trees to be burnt, to prepare the land for the reception of Indian corn—the scooping out of trunks of trees for canoes—or even the making of the patchwork furniture for the beds, which in winter protect new-comers against the severe northern blast that forces its way through the numerous apertures in their simple blockhouses. They respond willingly to any call made upon their good offices, and only require asking to come with axe or plough and work till late in the evening—perhaps harder and more diligently than during the course of the whole year they would labour for themselves.

While the men respond readily and willingly to these claims upon their time, the women show themselves still more eager in cases of illness—occurrences rare enough in the backwoods—to tender such help and advice as lie in their power. No one who can leave his abode will wait for a second summons; and, provided with all kinds of medicine hastily collected, they mount their horses, and are seen trotting to the spot at which their services are required as cheerfully as if they were going to a feast or a merry-making.

Mrs. Atkins was not, indeed, a very great favourite in the neighbourhood; for, in the first place, she hardly visited any one, and only very rarely attended the prayer-meetings: and besides, she was never to be seen at the patchwork frolic, or at a trunk-roll meeting, from which her husband was rarely absent. She thus necessarily became somewhat estranged from the beautiful Arkansas women. It was therefore a matter of surprise that she had on this occasion sent out to seek aid, in the middle of the night, with such alacrity. She would not have done this unless forced by serious danger, and few could refuse to help a child. The old grudge was forgotten; and before the sun attained its meridian, eleven women, most of them married and somewhat advanced in years, had arrived, with all kinds of powders and liniments, and more particularly with an almost incredible quantity of calomel, in order to preserve the life of the sweet child. The

little invalid was indeed in a very sad and even dangerous state, as a violent fever raged through its veins. Its sufferings must have been excruciating, for it could with difficulty be appeased, crying and moaning almost uninterruptedly. Its mother paced the room in despair, leaving the baby almost entirely in the hands of strangers, among whom the widow Fulweal had established a reputation as a doctor for children. For, as Mrs. Mullins told Mrs. Atkins in confidence, she had already cured three children of diseases unknown to any other woman in the neighbourhood. Five others, it is true, had died under her hands; but they had been afflicted with incurable maladies, as Mrs. Mullins could testify, having been present at the death of three of them. Mrs. Mullins suggested, too, that her own experience with respect to children and their ailments was not to be despised.

Amongst the ladies present, there were, besides Mrs. Fulweal and Mullins, Mesdames Barill, Smith, Teller, Hostler, and Rowles; two Miss Heifers, in the somewhat dangerous stage of past twenty-five, as they themselves confessed when compelled to state their ages; and several other farmers' wives from the northern and southern bank of the Fourche-la-Fave.

The new visitors occupied all the sleeping apartments at Atkins's, and Mrs. Fulweal in particular appeared to wield a certain superiority in this little circle,—a superiority which, though otherwise by no means conceded in the settlement, was now freely granted, on account of the especial cleverness she possessed in the art then most required.

It was after noon, and the women were engaged in seeking to afford relief to the little sufferer, trying all kinds of remedies, and almost choking it with syrup, tisanes, and calomel powder, which they administered in quantities enough to kill six hardy town children, when three of the Regulators trotted along the road which led from Barill's to Atkins's. They proceeded slowly, and kept stopping from time to time as if they were waiting for somebody whom they expected to overtake them. At last, just as they had reached a little hill, a horseman appeared on the opposite heights. He approached at a rapid gallop, and at a distance waved his hat as if he wished his companions to halt.

It was Cook, whose little animal seemed bathed in perspiration. He soon joined his three friends, Brown, Curtis, and Wilson.

"A plague!" he exclaimed, on pulling up sharply, as he drew his hat down over his eyes. "What do you run away for, as if you had all kinds of treasures to lose? Look at my pony—I shall expect the Regulators to provide me with another."

"We wished to wait for you on the top of this hill, Cook," said Curtis, "since——"

"And could you not have done that as well at Barill's house, so that we might have set out together like reasonable men? Do you suppose I found the Tennessee man sitting in the road, ready saddled and bridled, only waiting for me to come up?"

"Will he do what we require?" Brown exclaimed, quickly.

"What should you say if he would not consent, eh?" asked Cook, turning round to him. "In that case you gentlemen would have had a nice ride on horseback, and there would be an end of the matter."

"But he is coming, is he not?"

"Ay, of course," said Wilson, smiling; "only look at his face—he cannot conceal his satisfaction. Come, out with your story, Cook; time presses, and if you keep us standing here, it will excite suspicion."

"And yet we must remain here until we have come to some understanding on all points," said Cook. "Why did you not wait at the proper place?—it serves you quite right. You fancy, because you have finished your dinner, that other people can wait till the next meal-time. However, to speak seriously, Stevenson is coming, with his eldest son, and three of his horses."

"In addition to the animal which he rides?" asked Brown.

"Every horse-stealer of course rides on the stolen horses," said Cook, laughing. "Oh, Brown! you are still very green in these matters. These, indeed, are the chief recommendations of a horse-stealer who is up to his business,—to stick for a week together on the back of an animal, and then to be able to make shift on foot. Every horse of his own that he rides is so much pure loss. But what plan have you decided upon?"

"Has not Harfield told you?"

"No; he relied upon my catching you on the road. The lazy fellow was lying under a tree taking his repose."

"I suppose he told you this much, at least—namely, that you and Curtis must sleep at Atkins's to-night."

"Yes; but nothing more."

"And where is the Tennessee man?"

"Up at Barill's with his son. The old man was all fire and flames when I told him of our plan, and was quite ready to take all his nags with him at once; but when the women heard of robbers in the neighbourhood, there was a grand uproar, and they declared their people should not go. But the old Tennessee man stood his ground, and would make no further concession than that the two youngest boys should remain behind to protect the women. They covered themselves with knives and pistols, to quiet the women; Ben, the youngest, was warned not to hurt himself; and then we set off as fast as the horses would carry us. Now for your plan."

"It is simply this," replied Brown. "The Tennessee man—what's his name?"

"Stevenson."

"Stevenson must remain at Barill's until night—you two, Cook and Curtis, will accompany us to Atkins's, and there take up your quarters under some pretext or another. And we two, Wilson and I, will ride past."

"Then why did you come down here so soon? You might as well have remained at Barill's," Cook said.

"In order that Atkins may not have his suspicions excited," replied Wilson; "if he sees us ride quietly homewards, he will of course believe that everything is all right, and will not make any further inquiries. As Brown is the leader at the Fourche-la-Fave, Atkins will think the meeting is all over, as soon as he sees that he is off home."

"And where shall you conceal yourself in the meanwhile?"

"We shall ride as far as Wilson's house, leave our horses there, and return on foot."

"Listen; you will have to take good care of spies. I would not trust some of our neighbours out of the reach of my rifle," said Cook, in a warning voice.

"We trust them no more than you do," replied Wilson.

"But in order to lull suspicion we shall shoulder our rifles and go to the salt-lagoon that is south of my house. It is not far, and we can be at the appointed place in a very short time."

"And where will the others go?"

"Wilson, who has often been in Atkins's house, thinks he can with tolerable certainty point out the place where the secret door is to be found. At any rate, the reedland—which stretches from Atkins's house down as far as the Fourche-la-Fave—must furnish us with a hiding-place. It is almost impossible to penetrate this retreat. Hecker assured me some time ago that he shot a turkey, and though he heard it fall, he could not get at it, on account of trunks and stumps."

"What number shall we muster?"

"About eighteen; and that will be quite sufficient."

"What shall we say to Atkins if he asks about Jones?"

"Curtis has settled that already; but I may as well repeat it. You must say that Harfield has taken him to a meeting on the Petite-Jeanne, whence—as that river is somewhat nearer to the frontier, and therefore more exposed to robberies from that quarter—a detachment of Regulators is to be sent to the Missouri border."

"And will he believe that?"

"Why not? He will think Jones has persuaded them into it in order to draw them off the trails of the rascals nearer at home. When you are in the house, and hear our signal—the shrill whistle—you must immediately seize upon his weapons, for we will spill no blood if it can be avoided."

"And what shall we do with all the women who were there this morning?"

"They will be somewhat in our way; but that cannot be helped. Moreover, if they should be there still, they sleep in the other house, and can in no way interfere with the execution of our plan."

"Would a shot not be a better signal?"

"A shot! in the middle of the night! No; that would never do. Why should we alarm the neighbourhood—especially when it can be helped?"

"You have said nothing of the mulatto; he is, of course,

in league with his master; and if any of their party happen to be near the place, he is sure to go and call them."

"We will guard all the roads and paths," said Curtis, "and he must fall into our hands."

"Should he take the way through the wood, what then?"

"I do not think he will do that such a dark night," replied Brown; "but if he does, it cannot be helped. Should we catch the principal receiver in the act, we must make him name his accomplices in the robbery of Harfield's horses; and among them we shall be sure to find the murderer of the Indian woman."

"Come, then," said Cook, "this loitering on the top of the hill might, if we were seen, create suspicion. I wish the Indian were here, he would be of great service to us. I almost begin to think that he has gone for good, though such a conclusion did in the beginning seem highly improbable. It is certainly extraordinary that he should not have communicated his intention to any of us."

"Mullins says he believes that he saw him yesterday in the wood," observed Curtis; "but it was in a thicket, and only for a minute. He also told me that he had called to him—that is, shouted in the direction in which he had seen him—but could not make him hear, or, at any rate, show himself."

"He has *not* left the neighbourhood," said Brown; "I would swear to that, for he asked me to promise not to leave the country until Alapaha had been avenged; and it is not probable that he would have left the task of doing that to me."

"Well, we shall see," said Cook, shaking his head. "If, however, he really intends coming back, and if he wishes that something may be done in his affair—which, indeed, is also our own—he would have done better, in my opinion, to have remained here, and to have instituted his investigations upon the spot itself. But, as I said before, we shall see."

After this conversation, the men hastened on and approached Atkins's dwelling, which was situated at the foot of a gentle incline. He stood at the doorway, and seemed to be expecting them. When they reached his fence, and he did not observe the stranger amongst them, he went to

meet them. A question respecting the stranger seemed to be upon his tongue; but he did not give utterance to it.

"How is the child, Mr. Atkins?" asked Brown.

"I am sorry to say, not very well. I fear we shall lose the poor thing. Well, is the meeting over?"

"For the present—yes. The ladies from the neighbourhood are all still here, are they not?"

"Almost all of them; or, at any rate, eleven out of the dozen—enough to kill half-a-dozen children; but such is my good lady's wish. Well, has anything been decided upon? But," he said, suddenly, "will you not dismount, gentlemen, and rest a little? you have plenty of time for a halt; or perhaps you will accept of the shelter of my roof for the night."

"No, I thank you, Atkins," said Brown; "at least, I thank you for myself; uncle has gone over to Roberts's, and so I shall have to look after the house and feed the animals; otherwise I should have been most happy to accept your invitation."

"I tell you what it is, Brown; you may ride on by yourself," said Curtis. "I shall remain here for the night; I have nothing to do at home."

"And I shall keep you company," said Cook—"that is, if Atkins has room for two guests, and his lady-visitors have not occupied all the rooms."

"Plenty of accommodation—only dismount; I am curious to have the news. Where did you leave my guest?"

"He went with Harfield to the Petite-Jeanne; but we will tell you all about it when we get in-doors," replied Cook, as he took the saddle off his steed and hung it on the fence.

Curtis followed his example, and Brown (Wilson having ridden on) waved his hand to the company and galloped off in order to overtake his friend.

Atkins conducted his two guests into his house, where they found sitting in the chimney-corner another young man, whom their host introduced as Mr. Weston, "his cousin," adding that he had come to the Fourche-la-Fave with the intention of settling there, but that he wanted, in the first place, to get acquainted with the country, and would therefore live with him (Atkins) until he had done this and found a farm.

"I am much mistaken," said Curtis, "if I have not seen you before somewhere, or, at least, somebody uncommonly like you."

"That is very possible," Weston replied, a little confused. "Once, on my way to Little-rock, I stopped here for a few days. I believe I met you at the hunt."

"So you did," said Curtis, "now I remember; it was pretty high on the river where you were squatting. My memory has not deceived me, then."

"You said that Mr. Jones had gone over with the others to the Petite-Jeanne," Atkins observed, rather anxiously, "did you not? Is he going to remain there long?"

"No," replied Curtis; "he asked us to tell you, in case we passed your house, that he would return at the latest by noon the day after to-morrow."

"Are the Regulators in that part of the country going to hold a meeting too?"

"Yes, as I understand, to-morrow morning. Harfield has induced several of the Fourche-la-Fave men to go over with him."

"But I thought you intended to name some suspected persons at your meeting, and to arrest and examine them. Have you altered your plan?" asked Atkins; and it was evident to all that he felt peculiarly interested in the matter.

"It is true that such was our intention," said Cook, stepping to the chimney, and putting his feet to the fire, in order to dry his boots; "but we have not yet been able to come to an understanding. In fact, we do not think that we have sufficient grounds to proceed against any one in particular; and Jones, as well as Brown, were not quite agreeable to the adoption of that plan."

"Mr. Brown was not?" asked Atkins, astonished.

"No—however, next week I think we must carry it out; for something *must* be done," said Cook; "otherwise the rascals will make game of the Regulators."

"Weston, will you be so kind as to look after these gentlemen's horses?" said Atkins, addressing the young man, who had risen and gone to the door. "You may take the saddles from the fence," he continued, as the other was about to obey, "those wretched cows nearly consumed one yester-

day; and then go over to my wife, she wanted to speak to you."

Weston nodded, in token of his readiness to do everything as desired; carried the saddles into the house, and went round to the back part of the premises. On reaching this locality, instead of making for the little stable in which the horses stood, he jumped the fence, where he could not be observed from the house, and the next moment he had disappeared in the thick wood in the rear.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE INDIAN ON JOHNSON'S TRAIL—JOHNSON RESOLVES TO KILL HIM—THE ISSUE.

"I WONDER where Weston can be?" said Cotton, pacing up and down impatiently in the little hut, which for several days had served him for shelter and an asylum. "This morning he promised to bring me news, and by this time the Regulators must surely have separated. They will not keep together for a week. I am growing nervous here at the idea of being seized and Lynched. A plague upon the scoundrels! I shall have to bid good-bye to this neighbourhood. *Such* a life as I lead is really insupportable."

"There will always be time enough for flight," replied Johnson, yawning. He was reclining upon the only bed in the room. "I should not like to lose that other lot of which Jones spoke, and which we shall be able to get next week. There are no less than seventeen horses! Such a prize will defray the expenses of moving."

"I do not see how we are to get them all away," grumbled Cotton; "and, besides, the horses which Weston has hunted up will arrive at about the same time; and if the fellows are not able to follow such a trail, they must be blind, indeed."

"We shall not take them through the wood," Johnson observed. "Weston has already made an agreement with the captain of a steamboat, who will take them on board at Fort Gibson."

"In that case, our pursuers will only be the more certain

to find us out," exclaimed Cotton, with astonishment, stopping suddenly in his walk.

"And what does it matter?" said Johnson, laughing. "They cannot catch a steamboat. Moreover, we shall disembark at Little-rock; and if even they should follow us in another boat—though you know it is not often that two or three steamers are to be found at Fort Gibson at the same time—they are sure to be thrown off the scent. At any rate, we shall have time to reach the Mississippi swamp, and thence the Island. Fourche-la-Fave wont see me again in a hurry."

"It will be a great loss for the county," replied Cotton; "but here comes Weston. Well, it is about time—the sun is setting."

While Cotton was speaking, Weston leaped over the low fence, and the next moment appeared at the door of the hut.

"What is up?" Johnson exclaimed, rising hastily from his couch, as he caught sight of the ashy face of the young man. "Your countenance tells me that something is wrong; what is it? Are the Regulators——"

"No, no," whispered Weston, shaking his head; "we have nothing to fear from them yet."

"What is up, then?" asked Cotton, angrily; "you look as pale as death. Speak out, man, what is the matter?"

"The Indian has returned," the other replied, throwing himself, quite exhausted, into the only chair of which the room could boast.

"Well, if that is all," observed Johnson, with a jeer, resuming his old station on the bed; "if it is nothing more, you might have spared us the alarm. What nonsense, to come in here just as if half-a-dozen of those yelping Regulator hounds were at your heels. What did they do at their meeting? Where is Jones?"

"He has gone to the Petite-Jeanne with Harfield. There will be another meeting to-morrow. Cook and Curtis are at Atkins's. Nothing has been resolved upon concerning us. So far so good; but as regards the Indian, you, Johnson, ought not to take it so lightly. It is your trail he is tracking."

"Mine?" Johnson ejaculated, and his fears seemed to re-

vive. He continued, with an air of incredulity—"How should he be upon my trail? Harfield and all his band were upon it, and yet they were obliged to go back without having accomplished their object."

"Have you been along the path between this place and Atkins's house to-day?" asked Weston.

"Yes, about half an hour ago. Why?"

"As I was coming here by that very path," Weston continued, "just at the spot where the young gum-tree has fallen across the road, as I was going to turn round, I saw something moving. I thought at first it was a bear which had strayed there, but I recognised the Indian, who was walking straight towards me, in a stooping posture, with his eyes closely fixed upon the ground. A meeting seemed unavoidable, and I had made up my mind to advance from behind the bush which sheltered me, in order to speak to him, when, at about fifteen paces from me, he stopped. He had reached a wet and swampy part of the road, and seemed to be examining some tracks. I noticed that he found some of them very distinctly marked. He knelt down, took his tomahawk from his belt, and compared the track with the measure of another, which he had to all appearance marked upon the handle. He drew himself up, and, turning his back upon me, shook his arm in a threatening manner towards this house. He then left the path, went to the right, straight over the hill, and disappeared in the forest."

"And the foot-print?" asked Johnson, eagerly.

"Was yours," Weston replied. "As soon as that accursed savage had disappeared, I came quickly forth out of my hiding-place, and examined the track, which I saw plainly enough was yours."

"Did you not follow the Indian?" asked Cotton, while Johnson, lost in meditation, kept pacing the room, stamping the floor, and grinding his teeth.

Weston was about to reply, when Johnson, stopping in his walk, asked—"What became of him?"

"I did not at first deem it safe to follow," said Weston. "To speak seriously, I had no particular wish to be found by the Indian upon his trail. I could not, however, refrain from running up to the top of the hillock. From that place, you know, one can look over the valley as far as the brier-

thicket. I crept as quietly as possible to the top, still fearing that the Indian might have remained hidden somewhere on the road. He was not there, and I was about to retire, thinking he had turned back through one of the little valleys that cross to the right and left towards Fourche-la-Fave, or shaped his course through the pine-thicket on the ridge of the opposite hill to the higher parts of the mountain range, when suddenly I saw below, for it was getting dark, what seemed to be a flash of fire. Immediately after, all was dark again; but in a few moments I saw the same light again, and felt assured that the Indian was trying to kindle his fire, probably intending to camp there for the night."

"And where is that spot?" asked Johnson, quickly.

"You know the place—just on this side of the sweetbrier-thicket," said Weston, "where, in the last hurricane, a great number of pines were blown down upon the hill."

"The spot where we shot the wild cat some time since?"

"Just there," exclaimed Weston. "As far as I could make out, that must be the identical spot."

"Then he has selected the ground under an overhanging rock, which will afford him shelter from the dew, as well as any foul weather that may arise," said Johnson, in a voice half suppressed with passion. He then took down his rifle from the place above the bed, where it hung, and examined the lock.

"What do you intend to do?" asked Cotton, amazed.

"Make an end to that Indian spy's career," replied the other.

"Nonsense, Johnson," exclaimed Cotton, angrily. "You will only raise the whole neighbourhood against us. What does it matter to you whether that red beast knows the length of your soles or not? As long as we only leave the print of our own shoes in the mud there is no danger, and he may examine as long as he pleases; with a horse's shoe the case would be somewhat different, no doub and——"

"You do not understand that," said Johnson, with sinister look; "this is not the first time the fellow has taken the measure of my foot. I know that he has done it before upon other occasions. There can no longer be any doubt but

he is on the right track, and, what is the worst of the matter, he knows it too ; therefore he must die."

"I will be hanged if I understand you," said Cotton, knocking the logs of wood in the chimney together with his feet. "If the matter is not very pressing, I should advise you to defer it until——"

"Until the Regulators have got me fairly in their claws, and tied me up to the nearest oak? Not so, you prudent man. No ; there is no security for me so long as that Redskin lives—therefore he must die."

"I should like to know what grudge you bear the Redskin?" replied Cotton, in an angry mood. "A—when—the —affair with—well, with that squaw happened, you were many miles distant on the road, and suspicion cannot therefore fall upon you ; and as for the horses——"

"But I tell you," cried Johnson, driven to extremities, "horses have nothing whatever to do with the matter, and —but what is the use of going over that story with you?"

"Ah!—so," said Cotton, in long-drawn tones, suddenly halting, as if a new idea had flashed across his mind ; "does the wind blow from that quarter? I see ; I did not know you had been concerned in *that* business."

"Oh, bother your suspicions," replied Johnson, ill-humouredly. "I wish it was quite dark ; I am all on fire with impatience."

"Yes, yes," continued Cotton, not paying the least attention to the interruption ; "if matters stand thus, then, indeed, I should advise you to make all safe. Why did you not tell me about the affair? I certainly should not have betrayed you."

"What are you talking about, I wonder?" asked Weston, quite astounded. "I can make nothing out of your confounded hints. What does all this eternal mystery mean?"

"Yes, this is just the time to stand still, telling stories," Johnson replied, with a sneer. "No, I shall be off. I can no longer contain myself."

"Johnson," said Cotton, "I do not like the rifle. The report of a gun in the middle of the night will be heard too far ; and why make this useless noise? I have got the arrows ready, of which we spoke. Do you know how to handle a bow?"

"Like an Indian," replied Johnson. "I lived for seven years among the Shawanese; but—a plague upon it! I always thought a bow a very treacherous weapon—I prefer a bullet——"

"Well, at least you can make a trial with the arrows," said Cotton, going up a low ladder into the upper room. He soon returned with a bow made of hickory-wood, and four arrows. "Here," he said, "now try your hand. Stop, here is a potato. I will place it in the ashes. Step back into the corner. Now, aim at the potato."

Johnson took the bow in his hand, and examined it with a smile upon his countenance. He stood aiming for several seconds, and then launched the arrow at the target, in the corner of the hearth.

"Excellent," cried Cotton; "a capital shot. Only aim as well at the red scoundrel, and he will not run very far afterwards."

"After all, I do not consider it a safe method," said Johnson, hesitating, though pleased at his good shot.

"Uncertain? Why, the poison will kill a man in five minutes," Cotton exclaimed, in a whisper; "only touch the Indian in the arm, or the finger, and he will not be able to get to this house again, were he to run in a straight line as quickly as his legs would carry him."

"Is the poison sure to kill?"

"As sure as I hope to escape the clutches of these rascally Regulators."

"Oh, spare that poor Indian's life!" Weston said. "Why spill his blood? Too much has already been shed; I really grow quite sick of your company. You speak of a human life as if it was that of a stag or a bear."

"Now, that fellow begins to talk nonsense," said Johnson, as he examined the arrow which he held in his hand. "I wish you would mind your own business, and let us do as we please. The Indian shall die."

"In that case, I will have nothing to do with it," exclaimed Weston, resolutely. "His blood be upon your heads. To-morrow I shall return to Missouri. I joined you for the purpose of horse-stealing; but I find you thirst for blood—nothing but blood—I shudder at it—good night!"

He rose, as if about to leave the room.

"Stop!" cried Johnson, half frightened, half threatening, running towards the door. Apparently without any definite purpose, he held the poisoned darts towards the young man. "You intend to betray us!"

"Help!" cried Weston, drawing back aghast from the terrible weapons. "Murder!"

"A plague upon you!" cried Cotton, angrily, pushing Johnson, who had not quite conquered his distrust, from the door, and placing himself between it and the young man. "What madness seizes you?"

"I had forgotten about these poisoned arrows," said Johnson. "But why do you wish to go, Weston?"

"Because, in the first place, they will miss me at Atkins's; and because, secondly, I do not wish to be a witness of a fresh murder. To suppose that I wish to betray you, is not only wicked, but also absurd. I am too deeply committed with you to hope for pardon, even if I were not bound by my oath."

"You remember the oath!" said Johnson, in a softened tone of voice.

"Yes," Weston replied, with a slight shudder; "you have nothing to fear from me; but another time you ought to be more cautious with such weapons, and——let him live! Johnson, let him live!" he said, beseechingly, taking the arm of the murderous-looking man. "There may be some hope of security without taking his blood. Consider that the poor fellow has already lost his wife——"

"I will be hanged if I listen any longer to this stuff," exclaimed Johnson angrily, freeing himself from the young man's grasp. "Go—away with you—you cannot be of any use to us. But, Weston, remember your oath, and do not suppose that, even if God pardoned you, in case of betrayal, you could escape my vengeance."

"Reserve your threats for others," said Weston, gravely; "I am no traitor, but I wish to have no further communication with you. I shall return to Missouri to-morrow morning—I am not fit for such work."

"You had better say, not yet seasoned to it," said Cotton, laughing. "Well, I wish you good luck, Weston, if you really are serious; and—if I am lucky, I shall join you in Missouri in a few years."

"Farewell, Johnson," Weston replied, holding out his hand to him; "let us cherish no ill-will."

"Farewell," the other answered moodily, as he turned away.

The young man departed, climbed the fence, and the next moment had disappeared through the thick brushwood which surrounded the house.

"We ought not to have let him off thus," said Johnson, pacing the room. "I do not trust that fellow."

"He is honest enough," Cotton replied; "I know him—he will never betray any one; there are others, however, in whom I do not place much confidence."

"You mean Rowson?" Johnson suggested, halting before him.

"Yes!"

"He is too deeply involved. If everybody were as safe as he——"

"Yes, he is safe enough for the present; but let him get into a scrape, with the rope on one side, and the hope of escape on the other, I would much rather trust to my legs than to his honesty. I do not rely much on him."

"It is getting dark," said Johnson. "I shall go now. I do not know how it is, but I should, after all, prefer the rifle."

"You are a fool!" Cotton exclaimed; "you can shoot with as great certainty with the one as the other; and in one case there is no fear of discovery, whilst in the other the report must betray you. If they find the corpse——"

"I shall be far away from this place," replied Johnson. "Do you suppose I meant to remain here longer, exposed to those Regulators?"

"But the horses?"

"You may manage that lot yourselves; to-morrow I shall set out for the Island. I shall get my things ready during the night, and at break of day take one of Roberts's horses, which are always grazing near his house. Before they can find the Indian I shall be away."

"But Rowson?"

"He may follow me when he perceives danger—he knows where I am bound. Will you accompany me?"

"I promised Atkins that I would look after the next lot

of horses, and I mean to keep my word. Moreover, necessity compels me, for my purse is empty. The last adventure brought wonderfully little. When that is done, I may perhaps accompany Atkins to Texas. So you persist in taking the rifle?"

"The rifle and the arrows," said Johnson. "I shall try the poison first, and if I am not quite satisfied with my shot, then the lead may be of use."

"Do you think you can creep safely up to him unobserved?"

"If he squats where I expect to find him, I can do so very safely, as there are not many dry leaves near the rocks," Johnson replied, exchanging his heavy shoes for light mocassins.

"Well, if it *must* be so, at least take care to aim steadily, and mind you hit him well," said Cotton.

"Don't be afraid; if I can once approach within the right distance, he is mine. Besides, that place is very solitary, and he must bawl very loud if he means to arouse anybody. Where will you remain in the meanwhile?"

"Here—I will brew a good lot of hot stuff, in order that you should find something warm on your return. Heathcott then——"

"Don't allude to that old story, but make your drink, that will be a good deal more reasonable."

"Don't keep me waiting long," the hunter called after him, as Johnson was about to leave the hut.

"I shall not lose any time, you may readily imagine," the other replied, as he slammed the door, and with a cautious, but quick step, glided through the dark forest towards the nearest mountain-ridge, in which direction Weston said that he had observed the Indian's fire.

The night was very dark; no star shone in the sky covered with sombre clouds, and the waving of the tops of the trees gave warning of an approaching storm. High up on the mountain-ridge which divides the waters of the Fourche-la-Fave from those of the Mamell a solitary wolf howled its night-cry hoarsely, and the owl replied from the dark pine-top, in which it hoped to find shelter from the approaching tempest. Animals and men sought protection in the warm chimney, or in the thick reedland. The murderer, with his sanguinary

thoughts, heedless of the signs of a hurricane, grasping his rifle and his bow firmly in his clenched hands, pursued his way along the path. The more wildly the elements raged the better pleased was he, for this very storm afforded him greater security. Should he really find the Indian squatting at that place, he would certainly in such a storm be under the protection of the overhanging rock, and thus would not hear the steps of his approaching foe. The noise in the branches of the trees would drown every other sound. Revenge was certain if the victim could be found.

Cautiously Johnson followed the windings of the little ravine, though he might have taken a nearer way to the spot which was so well known to him. It is difficult on a starless night to keep straight through the forest, and even the experienced backwoodsman does not attempt to do this excepting in cases of absolute necessity.

He had covered the points of the poisoned arrows with a woollen cloth, so that he might not by any accident wound himself. With his weapons in his left hand, feeling his way with his right, he climbed higher and higher, until he was certain of his whereabouts.

In this spot the ravine made a sudden curve, and just above it was the rock where the Indian must be lying. Johnson resolved to examine the place, since discovery was no longer to be feared. He avoided any unnecessary noise, and crept onward over the trunks which had fallen across the ravine. He left his rifle at a spot where he could easily get it again, as he did not wish to be impeded by carrying too many weapons. In this manner he glided, serpent-like, towards the corner which still separated him from his victim.

Triumph! his heart beat almost audibly; for there—stretched out before the fire—he caught sight of the red son of the woods, little suspecting the impending danger from lead and poison. His weapons rested at his side, and supporting his head with his right arm, he looked thoughtfully into the glimmering flame. Johnson grasped his bow, rose convulsively, and looked towards his foe, as if anxious to choose the best part of his body at which to aim the deadly arrow. The distance between him and his victim was now little more than ten paces. An obstacle appeared—the

Indian's blanket, which he had hung up to windward in order to protect himself against the rain, concealed the greater part of his body, so that only his forehead and part of his right arm were visible, while the rest of his body was completely hidden by the woollen awning. Johnson soon made up his mind as to the part of the Indian's body at which he should aim, and had he had his rifle at hand instead of the arrows, would not have hesitated another moment. But he dreaded lest the blanket should ward off his shot, or take the poison out of the arrow. This new alarm caused him to hesitate, as he did not like to fire without being quite certain as to his aim.

His apprehension was increased by dread of his powerful antagonist. Johnson knew that he was resolute, and would if only wounded pursue and probably overtake him, and split his skull with his sharp tomahawk.

The blanket was, however, stretched out in such a manner that he merely had to creep up on the right-hand side, behind a thick tree, which stood close to the ravine, in order to get an aim at the breast of the squatting foe. The arrow could not fail to do execution at that capital spot. Just at that moment a flash of lightning illumined the scene, and cast its pale, ghastly light over the landscape. The gigantic trees cracked and waved their immense branches, as the next minute they rocked in the fearful hurricane. Johnson got up, intending to creep to the place he had fixed upon in order to execute the murderous deed. A stone slipped from under his right hand, with which he had hitherto kept a firm hold upon the protruding roots of a large oak, and rolled down into the bottom of the ravine. Johnson remained motionless, hugging the ground in order not to betray himself to his victim. After a pause he raised his head slowly in order to see what effect this unexpected noise might have had upon the Indian.

The sound had not escaped the watchful ear of the savage. Listening with all attention, he raised his head over the blanket and gazed around the space illumined by his fire. Johnson crouched beneath the shadow of the oak, which grew out of the ravine, and so Assowaum did not perceive him.

A brighter flash of lightning illumined the ravine, and the would-be assassin shrunk back. The Indian, too, seemed

blinded by the flash, for he pressed his hand upon his eyes and then resumed his former position. Johnson watched him eagerly for a moment, then, serpent-like, glided back five or six paces, and reached a place where he could not have been seen by his victim, even if it had been broad daylight. He climbed up the right side, behind the tree he wished to reach, from which position he had his victim close before him. On reaching this spot he bent his bow slowly, fixed the deadly arrow, and raised himself cautiously for the shot. He almost uttered a cry of amazement and terror on perceiving that the place before the fire was empty—that Assowaum had disappeared! Before another idea could enter his mind, before he could even move a limb, he felt a hand upon his shoulder; starting back in horror, he gazed into the threatening face of his foe—saw the arm of the Red man raised—the tomahawk flashed in the light of the fire, which, flaming up, threw an uncertain light over the scene—and struck by the flat side of the dangerous weapon, he fell without a cry, completely stunned.

Fearful, indeed, was his awakening. The lightning flashed through the waving tops of the trees. Rolling thunder followed. The sluices of heaven seemed open, and all nature was in convulsion. Bound so fast that he could not move a limb, nor utter a sound, the wretch lay at the root of a hickory-tree—left alone amid the raging of the furious elements. In vain he wrestled with the force of despair, in order to burst the links, and to free at least one arm. In vain he stretched his limbs, till the blood almost sprang forth from the sharp leathern belt which held them fast. Exhausted, he at last ceased his useless endeavours, and fel back upon the ground, breathing heavily, and again uncor scious.

The storm had somewhat subsided, yet the rain still streamed down, and the wind drove the dark masses of clouds along. The clear face of the moon now and then broke through the veil, shedding her pale silvery light upon the earth. Johnson had just roused up from his second swoon. An ague shook his limbs, and for the first time the dreadful idea flashed across his mind that the Indian had left him to perish, and that Cotton, tired of waiting, would seek to make his escape, and leave him to die a slow death

from hunger, unless some savage wolf should happen to come to put an end to his miserable existence. He could already hear their wild howls on the neighbouring hills. They were assembling after the storm to go in search of prey, and he had often observed their tracks crossing the ravine, at the spot in which he was now a prisoner. It was just in their way from the hills down to the river. Was he then to end his days in so horrible a manner? The howling approached; the wolf scents his prey for many a mile. Again the miserable man struggled violently, until the blood seemed starting from his veins. Despair gave him the force of a giant, but he could not break the bonds with which the Indian had bound him. Then he lay quiet and stiff, as if hewn out of stone. Why was he listening in anguish, yet in hope? Why was his look fixed on that dark clump of trees in the ravine? It was not in that direction that he heard the howl of the wolves. Their cry came from quite a different quarter. No, it was not the wolves that attracted his attention, but a well-known and friendly cry. It was the imitation of the owl, the sign among the confederates. It must be Atkins or Cotton, perhaps both of them. They were in search of him, and here he lay, bound and fastened, unable to move a limb, or to reply by a single sound. Nearer and nearer came the voices; louder and louder was his name re-echoed.

At last a form appeared upon the upper part of the ravine. Johnson could clearly recognise the outlines of the figure in the dark background. Again the cry of the owl resounded three times, and even four times. The prisoner writhed like a worm, but could not free himself from his bonds. At last—at last steps were heard nearer. The man had crossed the ravine. Knowing the place where the Indian had camped, he went round it. He must now perceive his friend. Again that signal cry sounded, and with his body bent forward the hunter listened. Johnson tried his utmost to make a noise amongst the leaves with his foot, or to shake a young tree close at hand, but all his efforts were in vain. The wind stirred the branches; the leaves were damp, and his foot produced no noise. Yet the figure still approached. It was Cotton. Johnson could distinguish the very hat he wore; could see the light shining

upon his pale face. He came straight towards him : twenty paces further, and he must touch his friend's body. Again he stopped; uttered that signal cry, and listened in all directions. He could hardly hope to see his friend, he merely wished to hear his answer to his repeated shouts. Now and then he cast a shy and stealthy glance into the ravine, in which he probably thought that the corpse of the Indian was to be found. Suddenly he turned round ; he seemed to have changed his plan. After listening a few moments—almost within reach of his captive associate—he quickly and quietly disappeared in the nearest thicket.

His last hope of being rescued had passed ; no chance of salvation remained. The prisoner's heart sank within him in abject misery. He no longer heeded the howling of the wild beasts. He appeared to be indifferent to death—perhaps it was desirable. With one look of defiance, of powerless rage, directed towards the clear starry sky, now stretched out in all its purity above him, he closed his eyes, as if with that glance he bade farewell to every hope of life and deliverance.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ROWSON AT ROBERTS'S—THE WILD TURKEY CHASE—ELLEN AND MARION.

Dinner was over, the dishes had been washed and put away, and round the entrance of the little dwelling the friends had formed a snug circle. They chatted familiarly upon all manner of topics.

Rowson had placed his chair between those of Mrs. Roberts and her beautiful daughter, and held the hand of his intended in his own, whilst Harper had taken his place at Ellen's side, and Bahrens drew up close to Roberts. In spite of the numerous subjects touched upon, the conversation always kept coming back to matrimony, and Harper had been asked for the third time why he was not looking out for a wife, who might charm his old age.

"And help me off the hooks, I suppose, you mean," said Harper, laughing.

"Why—in a certain sense—yes," said Mrs. Roberts; "but after all, this would not be the principal object. Besides, I really do not exactly understand what you mean!"

"There is a strange story told in Tennessee," the little man observed. "I cannot vouch that the wife really did what is attributed to her; nor do I know whether I may relate it here."

"Come, out with it," exclaimed Bahrens; "there are two young women here who will soon be wives, and they may perhaps learn something from your tale."

"It may not be of much advantage to their husbands," Harper observed, shaking his head.

"You really excite my curiosity, Mr. Harper," said Mrs. Roberts. "May the girls——"

"Oh, it is a very harmless story, and happened to the judge in Randolph——"

"Then it really is true?"

"Certainly. The poor fellow was taken very ill; and as they kept doctoring him with calomel and castor-oil, he got weaker and weaker every day, so that the physicians—that is to say, the few quacks who hovered about in the neighbourhood—gave him up, and said that nothing could save him. His wife was at last left quite alone with him; but the poor fellow suffered dreadfully, and it was said that he could not die before he had unburthened his conscience. At last, however, he yielded up his spirit, the neighbours were called in, and the man was buried the next day—as it happened to be summer, and very warm. His widow was disconsolate; she wept and moaned unceasingly. At last one of her neighbours asked her a question concerning her husband's last moments.

"'Oh, dear me, my good Mrs. Lewis,' said the widow, 'you should have been here then, and seen how the poor fellow worried himself. He stamped, and turned, and clutched the blankets in his hands so tight, that I could hardly unloosen them again; he could not do it himself; he must have had the cramp, dear man. I carefully put my left hand upon his mouth, and kept his nose closed with the thumb and forefinger, and so he went to sleep like a dear little angel. It was a great consolation for me to see him die so quietly after all his torments and suffering.'"

"Why, good Heavens! she smothered him!" said Mrs. Roberts, rising from her seat, rather startled.

"Oh, no," said Harper, with a smile, "she only helped him to die. There was, indeed, some talk about it afterwards in the neighbourhood; but the month after the widow went up to Kentucky, and so the matter ended."

"Why, that is dreadful!" said Marion; "and you tell such a tale with a smile upon your brow."

"It is in some respects an odd affair," Harper observed. "It is certainly quite a new picture of matrimonial tenderness."

"Dear me," Roberts observed, joining in the conversation, "there are more such cases in the world. Only think how the 'steam doctors' are managing at present in Arkansas;—that tall fellow, Hartfort, the storekeeper, who was here a fortnight ago—the man, I mean, that was with us when we found the corpse. Bahrens, you were there, were you not?"

"Yes; but what were you going to say of Hartfort?"

"Oh, I remember; he is now pretending to cure with steam and calomel. At Locksmith's he put two children under ground in one week; and the day before yesterday, when he reached Bestrille's, who has only been upon that piece of land two months—she bought it from Pelter, and Bestrille paid a great deal too much——"

"How do these steam doctors effect their cures?" asked Ellen. "I have heard so much about them, yet could never learn in what way they go to work."

"Oh, the process would be uncommonly simple and harmless," said Bahrens, "if they would only leave all that cursed poisonous stuff out of their medicines. The steam really ought to cure by making the patient perspire, and they have learned that of the Indians. An Indian considers a violent perspiration as a panacea, and tries to obtain it in all kinds of illness. Tribes that live on the rivers dig real sweating-baths in the banks, into which they creep, whence they throw themselves into the water immediately. When they live in plains, where they can have no such advantage, they construct a low tent of skins—or where they are in communication with white people, of blankets—undress, which operation does not take an Indian long, creep into this little hut, and get their

friends to hand them in hot stones, which are heated at a large fire close by. The tent is closed up tightly, and on those stones they pour cold water, which evaporates and fills the little room with vapour. Many afterwards have cold water poured all over their body; others omit this addition; with this, however, the cure ends—except, of course, some mad dances and conjurations, which they cannot forego; but which, at least, do no harm. Our vapour doctors, moreover, feed their patients with lobelia,* and other such infernal plants, make them beverages with Cayenne pepper in quantities enough to burn their souls out of their bodies, and do not rest until nature conquers or is conquered."

"I know that—they shall not come near me."

"I really think Bahrens has been a vapour doctor some time or other, he knows all the process so well," said Harper, smiling.

"When you have taken a wife, Harper," Bahrens replied, "then you will want no more vapour doctors,—she will keep you warm."

"I am safe enough on that score; I do not see where or how I should get a wife, even if I wanted one, unless I managed as my brother did, who put himself up at a lottery."

"Put himself up at a lottery, Mr. Harper?"

"Well, the affair was extremely simple; he made six hundred lots at ten dollars each, for girls and widows under thirty years—you ought to have been one of the commissioners of inquiry—himself, with the six thousand dollars, the price of the six hundred tickets. constituted the prize."

"But, Mr. Harper——"

"He only managed to sell five hundred and thirty, and therefore kept seventy himself. He had strong hopes of winning himself back again; but he was sadly disappointed; a young girl, who had brought three witnesses for her being only eight and twenty, won him, and he is now a happy Paterfamilias. Here in Arkansas it might be difficult to sell six hundred tickets."

"Not if you were the prize," said Marion, smiling. "I am convinced that candidates would appear from all sides."

* Lobelia, a kind of poisonous plant, often called Indian tobacco, as the savages are in the habit of mixing it with their tobacco.

"And would you also take a ticket?"

"Why not?" said Roberts, laughing. "One often wins something that is not of much use. She might make a present of you to some friend—to Ellen, for instance. That would be allowed, would it not?"

"Oh, why not?" replied Harper, "and I should offer but few objections, too, in such a case."

Rowson listened to the conversation without joining in the same. He held in his hand the wing of a turkey, spread to the full extent, which he used as a fan to keep from Marion the flies and mosquitoes that kept swarming round her.

Mrs. Roberts also made use of a fan, for the heat became oppressive.

"We shall have a thunderstorm," said Roberts, taking off his coat; "the air is very sultry; I must look at the glass while I think of it, Rowson," he continued, rising and going towards the door of the house. "Do you know the people whose cart we saw just as you joined me at the salt-lagoon? They were townspeople, former neighbours of mine. I was very much pleased indeed to meet them again; and, Marion, the girls have grown up—you would not remember them."

"Oh, why didn't they call here?" asked Mrs. Roberts. "One seldom sees old friends. Do you know the Stevensons too, Mr. Rowson?"

"Not that I remember," the Methodist replied, "and I think I may say I have a pretty good memory in general. Stevenson—the *name* certainly is familiar to me, yet I hardly recollect any family in particular."

"He was on the other side of the Arkansas when the murder was committed," said Roberts, as he re-entered the room; "and he saw the murderer—fifteen degrees—it is astonishing."

"Impossible!" Rowson exclaimed, forgetting himself.

"O yes, just look at the glass,—fifteen degrees; ay, more than fifteen degrees," Roberts replied, mistaking the purport of Rowson's exclamation, and holding out the thermometer to him.

"Indeed!" answered Rowson, collecting himself; "but how could he?"

"Could he what?"

"How could Stevenson have seen the murderer? It was said that the old man had killed himself; no traces of any other person were discovered."

"Nonsense!" said Roberts, shaking his head. "He was standing behind a tree when the two passed, hardly five minutes before he heard the report of a gun. He swore to me that he could point out the criminal among thousands. If you had come a few paces higher up the road you would have passed their encampment. He is a splendid old fellow, and would have pleased you very much."

"I do not doubt it in the least," said Rowson, "but——"

"Now tell me, once for all, Roberts," said Bahrens, interrupting him, "how is that thing you have in your hand, and which you call a thermometer—how is it constructed that it will tell you how hot or cold it may be?"

"Well, the mercury rises when it is hot," the other replied, "and falls the colder it becomes."

"And the weather follows that?"

"No; the thermometer follows the weather."

"You told me once in the Green Mountains it had become so dreadfully cold because they had not got such an instrument up there."

"You are quite mistaken," said Roberts, laughing.

"At that time it was cold," Harper exclaimed; "that winter I lived on the Erie-lake, in Cleveland, and the quicksilver fell Heaven knows how much below zero. An old Pennsylvanian, with whom I lived, said it would have fallen much lower if the thermometer had only been longer."

"Does Mr. Stevenson intend to stay any time in this neighbourhood?" asked Rowson, who had kept his eyes fixed upon the ground as if lost in deep thought.

"No; he cannot spare the time. Don't you remember his saying—but now I recollect, you did not meet me till afterwards—no; he will proceed at once to the part where he means to settle, at the foot of the mountain range. He told me our land here on the Fourche-la-Fave pleases him uncommonly, and he seemed half inclined to remain here altogether, but his wife and daughter were afraid of the horse-stealers. They had heard such tales of them on the Arkansas—where, if I am not mistaken, they rested two

days, and bought another pair of oxen—for their old ones——"

"Well, the women need entertain no fears on that account," said Bahrens. "We shall soon get rid of them."

"No doubt," said Rowson, smiling; "people make it a good deal worse than it really is; the Fourche-la-Fave has a much worse name than it deserves."

"Hallo! what is the matter with the dogs?" cried Roberts, jumping up; "Poppy has been growling a long time, and now he is off across the fields as if the devil was at his heels."

"There are some wild turkeys, father," said Marion; "Ellen and I went in that direction before dinner, and we saw a flock close to the brook."

"Why didn't you tell us that long ago?" exclaimed Roberts; "I have not shot a wild turkey this week. Bahrens, will you join us?"

"Certainly," he replied, fetching his rifle, which he always carried with him; "and if I am not mistaken, the dogs see them already among the trees."

"O yes! I know Poppy's voice. Let us be quick, or they will drive them into the plains, and then they will be difficult to catch."

Bahrens did not want any further invitation, and the two men ran along the small path at the back, until they came up with the dogs, which kept wildly running about, uncertain, as it seemed, where the game had taken shelter. The hunters, too, in vain searched for the birds; for in the first instance the foliage was too thick, and in the second the cunning creatures got so close to the branches, that it was almost impossible to see them.

"It must have been an old bird," said Bahrens, "and they are not worth much."

"I don't think so," Roberts observed; "only yesterday I saw four hens together; they certainly cannot be breeding this time of year; and there is no better eating in the world than the flesh of young hens."

"In that case we must lie in wait," Bahrens said. "Call the dogs. You stop where you are, and I will go over there on the little hill. If we can keep the dogs quiet, it will not be long before the hens make a move; they never keep quiet long."

Roberts readily joined in the plan, called his dogs, and made them lie down, and for about a quarter of an hour neither of the men stirred. At last Bahrens imitated the wild turkey's cry most admirably, and before long one of them answered from a tree just above Roberts.

The dogs looked sagaciously at their masters, as much as to say, "Do you hear, the game is up there?" The cry was repeated, and the dogs grew impatient because none of the hunting party stirred, but Roberts wished to wait until Bahrens had a bird within shot. Several were at last heard in different parts, and Roberts then raised his rifle, stood up, and aimed at the game.

The wild turkey had meanwhile risen from the branch on which she had perched, and turning her long neck in all directions, looked about in order to see whether danger had disappeared. The report of Bahrens's rifle was heard, and Roberts having got ready almost at the same moment, both birds fell with a heavy sound from their perch, and were at once seized by the dogs.

While the two men had gone in pursuit of their game, Mrs. Roberts and Harper endeavoured to get into conversation with the Methodist, and had touched upon various topics, but Rowson seemed unusually disinclined to give anything but short replies; he appeared quite lost in thought.

The two girls amused themselves better. They walked arm in arm before the little dwelling, and talked of all possible subjects except their future prospects. It was rather remarkable that both of them should avoid the slightest reference to the matter. They chatted of their years of childhood and early youth. They recalled all the bright past, the loved sports, amusements, and pleasures of bygone times.

"Ah, dear Ellen," said Marion, standing still, and looking at her friend, with a sigh, "those were beautiful, blissful times, and we did not know what sorrow, pain, and grief meant. The passage from that happy age into riper life is so insensible, comes upon one so gradually, that one is not aware of it before those sweet days are gone for ever; and we stand, as it were, before an abyss——" She suddenly stopped, as if afraid to finish the sentence, and turned away her head that Ellen might not perceive the two large dewdrops which stood in her eyes.

"Why are you so sad, Marion?" asked her friend, soothingly. "You obtain the realization of your wishes, and I should think that a union with the man one loves ought not to make one miserable. I confess that I could not take such a step without some serious feelings. Have you other causes of sorrow?"

"No, dear Ellen," whispered Marion, still turning away her face, which was bathed with tears. "No, I am but a foolish girl, and should, on the contrary, rather look into the future with joyful confidence. But listen, did you not hear the reports of two guns? they seem to have found the game. Now there will be something for us to do this evening," she continued, with a smile, turning to Ellen. In her friend's eyes she saw the traces of tears, and she added, quickly and anxiously, "Ah, Ellen, dearest, best Ellen, what ails you? I am a spoiled child, and am always occupied about myself, so that I have hardly observed—at least not paid sufficient attention to the fact—that you yourself have been of late melancholy and downcast. May I know the cause of this?"

"Yes," said Ellen, smiling through her tears, "you shall know everything, but not now. In a few days, when you are more settled; but," she continued earnestly, "if I make you my confidante you must do the same to me in return. I shall expect that you will be equally communicative."

"I shall only be too happy, dearest Ellen."

"Then you have some secret sorrow upon your mind?"

"Mother called me, if I am not mistaken. I shall soon join you again," said Marion, running into the house. Her mother had not called her, but the poor girl wanted to be alone—away even from her sympathizing friend—that she might try to overcome the feeling which had got possession of her soul. She felt that the very thought of the man she loved so warmly was a sin, and that her task was to resign him altogether, and to live merely for the duties that must be dear and sacred to her at the side of her husband.

At this juncture the sportsmen returned with the game, and the conversation again became general, while the girls had plenty to do in plucking the wild turkeys before they grew cold—a task which was attended with numerous diffi-

culties. They both declared that for a long time they had not had such fine game in their hands.

Rowson appeared to have overcome his melancholy fit, and to have regained his usual tranquillity. Indeed, for the occasion, he seemed to wish to lay aside the usual grave demeanour of the Methodist preacher. He was lively and good-humoured, and pleased Marion better than he had ever done before. Mrs. Roberts was delighted; and old Mr. Roberts took Bahrens aside twice, to tell him that he thought the preacher was quite another man. At first he had spent nearly six hours in the house without speaking much, and then there was a certain ease and delightful change in his tone and manner, yea, even in his movements, which he had never before noticed.

"He is quite another person to-night," he exclaimed, rubbing his hands with delight. "I will be hanged if it is not even remarkable how he has changed; however, it is very much to his advantage, Bahrens—very much to his advantage."

Yet Roberts did not escape a sermon; for before retiring to rest, Rowson delivered a long and monotonous lecture, to which they were compelled to listen in patience.

The next morning, at breakfast, the plan for the marriage and holiday was decided upon. Mrs. Roberts gave it as her opinion that it would be best for them all to set off at once. She would go to her future son-in-law's dwelling, to put everything in order. They could dine there, and then in the afternoon ride over to the house of the judge, which was hardly a mile distant. Rowson quite agreed to this, but begged the company to wait about an hour for him, as he stated that he had to go somewhere on horseback; but that he should soon be back.

"You, Mr. Harper and Mr. Bahrens, will be our guests for to-day, wont you?" said Mrs. Roberts. "I will take no excuse—Mrs. Bahrens will not say anything about your absence; we must enjoy the day together. I only wish Mr. Brown was here too; but that cannot be helped. Mr Rowson, you will then finish your business, whatever it may be, as soon as possible; and on your return you will find us quite ready."

Rowson expressed his assent, mounted the horse which

the negro boy had brought out for him, waved his hand to the company, and trotted along the country road, quicker than was his custom when leaving Roberts's, or any other house in the settlement.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE AMBUSH.

When Weston left Atkins's house, the two visitors made themselves as comfortable as circumstances would permit, and Curtis stepped to the porch, and gazed thoughtfully at the dark masses of clouds which were collecting together in the west.

"I should not wonder if the storm came this way," said Atkins. "Only look how the white, thin veils of mist are flying towards us. I only hope we shall not have a hurricane. Six years ago, when I was at the White River, it looked exactly like this, and when it came it was fearful, though it did not last long."

"Were you on the White River six years ago?" asked Cook.

"Yes, and I lived about two miles below the road which leads from Memphis to Batesville."

"Why, that must have been about the time when they hung Whitley, who killed his own father—was it not?" asked Curtis.

"Somewhat later," observed Atkins. "I arrived about four weeks after he had been hanged."

The White River boys used to exercise strict justice," said Cook. "That horse-stealer—what was his name?—they made him dance upon the gallows too."

"I cannot blame them for it," exclaimed Curtis. "Upon such ruffians no honest man can have any mercy—that is to say, any honest man who has horses himself. Don't you think so, Atkins?"

"You are rather severe in your ideas of justice," Atkins replied; "but I think you must be hungry, are you not? I will——"

"I am much obliged to you," Curtis exclaimed, holding

him back. "We made a good dinner, and can wait your time; do not give yourself any trouble—your good wife has not much leisure now to get extra meals."

"No; that is true enough," said Atkins. "There is a nice hubbub over there—enough to drive a fellow mad."

"Isn't the child better yet?"

"Alas! no; but one can hardly expect such a thing. I always think it a bad sign enough, if a patient falls into the hands of *one* doctor; and there are eleven of them, all female ones. I have now such confidence in the excellence of my child's constitution, that I really think they cannot kill it, otherwise it would have died long ago. I must fetch a candle; it begins to get quite dark. Dear me, how the wind blows outside; it is a remarkably stormy spring this year." With these words he quitted the room, and the two Regulators found themselves alone, and able to converse freely.

"Hark ye, Curtis," said Cook, after a short pause. "I am sorry that Atkins should be a member of such a gang."

"Don't speak so loud," the other replied; "who the deuce can tell whether somebody is not hidden here? To speak the truth, I quite agree with you; he is on the whole a very nice fellow, and I always liked him. He has indeed a somewhat false look, but that may come from his constant endeavours to conceal something."

"I wonder what the Regulators will do with him," Cook continued, meditatively; "I hope they will not hang him. Listen, Curtis. I should not like to have his death upon my hands. He has indeed deserved punishment, and I perceive that in self-defence, and in order to put an end to these evil practices, we must make an example—but hanging, no! It must not be so severe a doom, if it were only on account of his wife and child."

"A pretty reason for clemency, that," replied Curtis, laughing. "If your ideas were to be carried out, every rogue would have nothing to do but to get married, in order to save his neck from the rope. No, that fact must not interfere to prevent the just punishment of crime. But we wont hang him, only——"

"Whist! he is coming back," said Cook, checking himself; and the unsuspecting host stepped into the room with a

candle, which he placed upon the table, and lighted it with a pine-link.

"It blows outside as if it would take the roof off our heads," he said, poking the coals in the chimney-grate. "If the wind does not shift, the storm will burst upon us in less than ten minutes."

"It is a bad job for those who have to be out in it," said Curtis; "the cattle, too, flocked round the houses this evening."

"Were there many people from the Petite-Jeanne at the meeting?" asked Atkins.

"Not many," said Cook. "They seemed as if they intended to wait till to-morrow, when the meeting will be held nearer to them. There was a stranger there, a man who is looking out for stolen horses."

"A half-caste man," replied Atkins. "Oh, yes; he called at my house, too, and inquired; I was sorry I could not give him any information."

"You have not seen anything of his horses?" asked Curtis, looking at him.

"No—how should I?" replied Atkins, in a tone of astonishment. "I have not stepped outside of my fence, and the thieves wont bring the animals openly under our noses."

"Hardly," said Curtis, smiling; "but what is the matter with the dogs? Why do they make such a terrible noise?"

"Perhaps one of the Regulators, driven here for shelter from the storm, approaches," said Cook.

"Probably," replied Atkins; "I will go and see. Be quiet, you wretches! Down, I say!"

With these words he stepped out into the open air, and Curtis whispered to Cook—"That is Stevenson; now look sharp. But he has chosen his time badly. We shall, at any rate, be obliged to wait till it clears up. Well, those fellows in the reedland will have a pretty time of it. When the rain and hail come down, they will admit that we have got the most comfortable part of the business."

"How far is it to the Fourche-la-Fave?" asked somebody outside, the loud tones of whose voice were heard above the howling of the dogs.

"Hallo!" cried Atkins, running down the steps, and hastening towards the fence. "That will be quick work if

the second lot are here already. Why, Jones told me it might be another week."

"It runs close by," he replied aloud to a man, who, wrapped in a thick mantle, was mounted on horseback.

"Who are you, sir? My name is Atkins."

"Have you good pasture ground here?" said the stranger, in a subdued tone of voice.

"Where do you come from?" whispered Atkins, equally low. "Speak."

"I want a drink of water."

"The devil! Jones told me it would be a week before you came."

"Let us get the horses in quietly," the stranger continued, in a whisper. "My boy is here with them, and a dreadful storm is gathering over our heads."

"The wet wont do them any harm," Atkins replied. "I have visitors in the house, and cannot come now."

"But the rain would wash away their tracks capitally," the other suggested.

"That is true enough; but how many have you?"

"Three."

"Only three!—why Jones spoke of seven."

"The others will be here to-morrow evening. It would not do to make the tracks too plain."

"Is that the boy I am to keep here to send on with the horses?"

"The boy? Oh, yes; he knows all."

"Does he know the way to the Mississippi?"

"We have just come from——" The old man was going to betray himself, but perceiving his mistake just in time, continued, after a short cough,—"We come from the west just now, but the boy has been at the Mississippi before. Be quick, the large drops are already beginning to fall."

"Wait a minute, and I will go and tell those inside that you are looking for shelter for yourself and your horse. Hallo! who is this?"

A man approached the fence, who was recognised by Atkins as Weston.

"Ah—you are just come in time, Weston," Atkins exclaimed. "Here is a stranger with horses—you know. Go with him behind the house, and see them safely lodged.

Afterwards, come to the house; I cannot leave the two Regulators alone there."

"Regulators! Have you any Regulators in your house?"

"They are only guests, who will remain here for the night," Atkins said, anxious to quiet his apprehensions. "You must wait until the storm is over; it is just going to burst now. When the horses once get to the brook it will do them no harm; nobody will find their tracks then."

"In the brook! But they are not standing in the brook yet; I have them up there, at the corner of the field."

"The deuce take you! Why didn't you bring them to the old place?"

"It is the first time I have been here."

"We had better take them in at once," exclaimed Atkins, annoyed. "I should not particularly like to have horses' foot-prints seen up there at the corner of the fence. Take them, Weston, to the back door. I will step into the house for a moment, and soon join you. Excuse me a moment, gentlemen," he said, addressing the two Regulators on his return into the room, after he had carefully closed the door; "a stranger, who seems to be very particular, and wants to get his horse under shelter, has just arrived. He will soon come in.—But, hallo! the storm is coming on with a vengeance. Dear me, how furious it is! That flash of lightning was blinding; one can hardly get one's sight again!"

"It is strange how clear one can see everything!" said Curtis, looking through a little window cut in the logs which formed the wall. "At such a flash, one can take in all the fields at a single glance."

"Will you not sit at the fire-side, gentlemen?" said Atkins, a little disturbed; "there is a draught where you are, and here one is much more comfortable."

"Certainly," said Cook, drawing his chair near the fire and sitting down, putting, in western fashion, his feet upon the mantelpiece. "Come, Curtis, let the storm roar outside as long as it pleases, and thank Heaven that you know your own skin is kept dry."

"I really am thankful for it," said Curtis, laughing, taking a bottle from the table; "and in order to show you how much I value it, we will just drink—bless me, what a

clap of thunder!—well, we will just take a good draught from this bottle. Hallo! where are you going, Atkins?"

"I must go for a minute to my wife. The women-kind will be frightened to death if they are left alone. I shall be back again presently."

He went out quickly, taking care to shut the door as closely as the wooden latch, which supplied the place of a lock, would allow. For a few seconds the two Regulators kept their seats without moving; then Cook sprang up, and said in a whisper—

"Curtis, my heart begins to beat wonderfully fast; what a night this is! the lightning really seems to smell of sulphur; those fellows in the reedland will get wet through."

"That cannot be helped," replied Curtis, examining the room. "Here are two rifles, one above each door—that is a necessary precaution."

"The best plan will be to put them out of harm's way. For ourselves, we shall not require them; and to prevent Atkins doing injury with them," he continued, standing upon a chair and taking them down one after the other, "I think we had better take the powder off the lock. Yes, indeed, they are both loaded, though the one is covered with dust. Are there any other weapons about the place?"

"I don't see any," said Cook, looking about the room; "perhaps he has some concealed somewhere."

"Just examine the bed, above and below; is there nothing?"

"No, I don't feel anything; but—here—yes, I have found a pair of pistols. Oh, that's not bad; they are handy in case the necessity should arise. Only wait a little, you rogue, and we shall spoil your fun. That's a good job done, and I should like to know which of his four fire-arms will go off first now."

"You had better be careful with the pistols, they sometimes go off very easily, even when one thinks there is no powder on the lock; and a single spark——"

"I have poured a little tobacco-juice into them, and the same to the rifles; and he might pull the triggers off before he could make them fire."

"I should not wonder if the storm were to blow the roof off the house. Did you hear that tree fall? By Heavens!

I begin to feel very uncomfortable; I wish we had waited for a better opportunity."

"My heart beats like a forge-hammer," said Cook, walking up and down the room. "We shall not even hear their whistle through the raging storm."

"It is all the same. We must not quit our post. I wish I could see something. It is not nice to walk about like this in the dark, all in doubt and uncertainty, while one knows there is a parcel of rough fellows lying in ambush somewhere, and waiting for their booty. It seems to me really just like squatting in the forest at night, and hearing a noise without knowing what or where it is."

"Or in some large cavern with a torch, hearing the growling of a bear without knowing exactly whereabouts he may be. I once—dear me, that time a thunderbolt must have fallen; the lightning and thunder almost came together—I was once in such a fix."

"Did you not hear something just now?"

"No. What can one hear in such a raging storm? I only pity poor Stevenson and his boy—they will have a good remembrance of Arkansas."

"Is the Canada man with them in the reedland, or have they posted him in the wood?"

"Oh, no; he is to be one of the attacking party, and good service, too, he will do. He is a stout fellow. Hark! Did you hear anything?"

"No, I did not. I wonder what the women will say."

"I am sorry that the child happens to be ill just now."

"That cannot be helped. By Heavens! that was the signal whistle. Now, Cook, let us be upon our guard. The crisis is at hand."

"Come quickly," whispered Atkins to the man, who was waiting for him outside the fence. "If we only get the business over, we shall be all the better for the storm; for this much is certain, it will wash away all tracks. The deuce take it for all that! it is no joke to be out in such weather. Jones told me you would not be here for a week."

"Oh, can't you stop talking until we get upon dry ground?" the old man murmured, pretending to be angry; "is this fit weather for conversation? I have nothing else to do but to deliver up the animals; and I wish I had left the job to

somebody else, for to be exposed to such a pouring rain is enough to kill one."

"Where are the horses?"

"Up there, somewhere at the corner of the fence. My boy is with them, that is to say, if the rain has not washed him away."

With these words he put two fingers between his teeth and gave a low but shrill whistle.

"What are you doing?" asked Atkins, astonished.

"Don't you perceive, he answered it over there," said the old man. "He really is still alive. Where is the entrance?"

"Just above there. You are not far from it. When you come again you had better ride into the brook about a hundred paces higher up. Do you see the place?"

"See! I should like to know how you can think that I do. See! See in such weather! Why, one cannot see one's hand before one, except when it lightens. Here is the boy. Ned, come here; are you still alive?"

"Yes, father," whispered the young man. "It is horrible weather. I feel awfully wet and cold."

"Nonsense! we shall get dry presently. Come, follow us. Did the horses stand quiet?"

"Pretty well—except the black one, which kept shying at the lightning."

"Of course; what animal could stand quietly such a night? But what are you doing? Are you pulling down the fence?"

"Yes," said Atkins. "I do not wish to have a door here; I have therefore hit upon this plan. There are too many spies in the neighbourhood, and the slightest thing in any way extraordinary creates suspicion. So, come here; take care, there are some trees cut down. Ah! that flash of lightning was just in time."

"Is the place where you keep the horses far from here?"

"Not a hundred paces. A plague upon it! what a clap of thunder! You may let the fence lie until we return, none of the horses can run away, they are all under the shed. Now follow me; this is the place."

Another dazzling flash illumined the scene, and showed Stevenson that they were standing near a fence, close to some reeds which had been bitten off on the other side.

"Wait a minute," said Atkins, quickly, "I only want to

push the fence and the lower trunks back; there will be an opening presently. Now, bring the horses down; nobody will look for them there. What are you doing?——treachery!"

He had good reason to be surprised; for as soon as the entrance to the hiding-place was opened, Stevenson gave a loud shrill whistle. The next moment a bright flash of lightning lighted up the spot with the splendour of day. Half blinded by its rays, Atkins looked round, and saw several dark figures approaching. The thunder rumbled over their heads. Just at that instant the powerful Tennessee man stretched out his hand ready to seize the horse-stealer by the collar; but the darkness favoured the man familiar with the locality, and he glided away. Stevenson took hold of his son, who had likewise been rapidly approaching to catch the criminal. A second flash of lightning showed the direction in which Atkins was seeking to make his escape; and Weston, too, who had been nearly paralysed by the first surprise, was at his side. The direction in which they bent their flight was guarded, and they had almost fallen into the hands of two other men, when another flash showed them the danger. Weston heard from that side the signal of the pursuers; and at once perceived that this was no casual and accidental discovery, but a well-concerted plan. He felt convinced that all chance of escape was cut off, and hoped to find the small path which ran between the two houses open, by which he might gain the forest, and thus at least get off for the present. Just as he was running along between the two buildings, he heard on his right hand a desperate struggle. Before, the loud voices of the approaching foe; behind, those already in pursuit. In his despair he rushed into the room in which the women were assembled. They rose from their seats with cries of alarm, not so much on account of the sudden intrusion, as of the frightful looks of the fugitive.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE LADIES' PARTY—VARIOUS CASES OF SICK CHILDREN RELATED FOR THE COMFORT OF THE MOTHER—A SURPRISE.

"Oh, Mrs. Mullins, I would thank you for another cup of coffee," said the widow Fulweal, as she rocked the groaning child in her arms, and kept walking up and down the room. "How his dear little head burns!" she exclaimed, holding the sick child so near the candle that it moved his feverish face and began to scream anew.

"Whist, baby—whist! do not cry: what lungs that child has, and this is now the third dose of calomel I have given him this blessed day. Whist, baby—whist!"

"Yes," said the elder Miss Heifer, filling her short pipe and placing some burning embers on it; "yes," she said, inhaling the smoke at every word; "yes—the poor little worm—has now—already—to-day—made our arms lame—poor little thing!"

"Have you a little more of that tobacco, Miss Heifer?" asked Mrs. Fulweal, stepping to the fire-place and producing a pipe of the same kind, which had been concealed between the logs of the wall. "I have only smoked two all day, and chewing does not agree with me. Oh, Mrs. Mullins, pray take the baby a little."

"Why do you not chew gum-wax?"* asked Mrs. Smith.

"I went out in search of wax the morning before last," said the young widow, "but Betsy would not give it me back when I came away. Good heavens! how the child keeps crying! Wouldn't you like to take another cup of coffee, Mrs. Atkins? It will do you good."

"Thank you—thank you," she said, stepping to the child and laying her cold icy hand on his glowing forehead.

* A very disagreeable habit among the inhabitants of the Far West of America, and of Arkansans especially, is to chew a kind of wax or resin, which oozes from the so-called gum-tree, and has a peculiar, sharp, and by no means sweet taste. The backwoodsmen—but, above all, the women and children—chew this gum-wax until they are tired of doing so, and then pass the quid to some other member of the family, who, without the least hesitation, chews it in turn.

"Dear me, it gets colder and colder,—it is sure to die to-night."

"Oh, no; nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Smith, calmingly, "nothing of the kind, Mrs. Atkins. I have seen children much worse than this. Mr. Preston's baby had dark purple spots upon his little cheeks, and was much worse than your little one. It coughed, too, a great deal more, and yet, for all that, it *did* live—that is to say, for five days."

"But it died, after all?" asked the mother, in anguish.

"Yes; I am sorry to say it did. We did everything we could for the poor little thing; Mrs. Fulweal knows that. It had several doses of Cayenne-pepper. It could not keep it all down, poor thing, its stomach was *so* weak. And the mustard poultice on its back made the skin as red as fire. It died at last."

"And what a dear angel the child was!" chimed in Mrs. Fulweal, who had got her pipe alight, and had taken the little one in her arms again, "a real cherub—it swallowed the calomel and the castor-oil as if it had been treacle; and then it was a real pleasure to see how calmly it died."

"Mr. Stewart's baby was such a sweet little thing, too, before it died," said Mrs. Smith; "it had just such a cough as this one: it is strange how illness comes on. In the morning it was fresh and healthy, and in the evening, pale and dead;—poor little soul!"

"How blue the spots are getting!" said Mrs. Barill, leaning over the sufferer.

"Where, where?" the mother cried, in anguish. "What did you say about these blue spots? Are they dangerous? Heavens! the child will be taken from me."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Fulweal. "Blue spots! I should like to know where blue spots are to be found? What on earth does Mrs. Barill know of children's diseases? The third that died under her hands was hardly six months' old, and all three were not ill longer than a week."

"The blue spots, a foreign doctor once assured me, are a very bad sign," said the youngest Miss Heifer. "My brother George's girl got them, and she nearly died that very night. As it was, she lived till the next morning."

"Has the child really got those blue spots?" Mrs. Atkins

exclaimed, in agony. "Have things gone so far already? Must it, then, really die?"

"Oh dear me, no," said Mrs. Heifer. "There is no danger. The blue spots are nothing. I do not like that wheezing cough. My poor little girl, who died last month, coughed exactly like that."

The mother sat down upon her bed, wringing her hands.

"Ladies," said Mrs. Rowles, who had been sitting quietly smoking her pipe, and now knocked the ashes out on the hearth, "I really do not see why you should worry this poor woman so. Good gracious! that is lightning! it struck all my nerves—neither blue spots nor a wheezing cough are so certain——" She paused, for the roar of the thunder drowned even the child's crying. "They are by no means certain signs," she continued, when the storm became a little quieter, "that one should always expect death. I myself know of two cases where both the children recovered; that is, the one went blind, and the other was afterwards bitten by a mad dog—but then the blue spots had nothing to do with that. What is the use of worrying oneself, when there is no real danger?"

"You think, then, my child may get better?"

"Why not? It has taken medicine enough to cure six children; and if it did not look so yellow about its eyes——"

"Yellow about its eyes?" asked the mother in terror, approaching the child with her candle. "What does that mean? Mrs. Fulweal, pray tell me—you are experienced; do tell me. Do you think that——" She did not dare to finish the sentence, but burying her face in her hands, she whispered, "I have deserved it—have deserved it on Ellen's account—deserved it from my knowledge of——" In terror she arose, fearing lest anybody might have heard these words, and then sank back into her former position.

That fearful clap and crash of thunder, referred to in a former chapter, resounded over the tops of the waving trees, and the women started up in amazement. For several seconds the silence of death reigned in the room. At last the youngest Miss Heifer whispered to Mrs. Mullins, who was sitting by her side—

"It was just such weather when Houston's first-born died—just such a thunder."

"We have not had such a thunderstorm for a long while," said Mrs. Fulweal, groaning, and lighting her pipe for the fifteenth time. "It is enough to frighten one, even under the shelter of the house. A bad night for those outside!"

"Of what disease did your youngest die. Mrs. Mullins?" asked the eldest Miss Heifer, drawing her chair nearer. "Some said it was the small-pox, and the report, as you may imagine, alarmed us not a——"

"Lord bless you! my dearest Miss Heifer—the small-pox—I really wonder how people can talk such stuff—the small-pox! The sweet little thing had nothing but a slight attack of cholerine, and I never could make out how it got that. It had eaten nothing but a few green peaches and plums, as children always do in summer, and those cannot have done it much harm."

"Were any of you present at the death of Mrs. Carlton's Anna?"

"I was," said Mrs. Smith, "and I do not wish to speak ill of Mrs. Carlton—but this much I do know, that she might have given me a cup of coffee, when one sat up all night; and a little tobacco would not have hurt."

"At that time the doctor from Little-rock was in the neighbourhood, was he not?" asked Mrs. Curmales. "Did they not call him in?"

"The doctor? I should like to know why?" observed Mrs. Fulweal, rather pointedly. "We know better about children's diseases. He comes with his few Latin terms, and gives the thing another name, and that is all. He has words for things, which are themselves enough to turn one's tongue to pronounce them; and—dear me, how it lightens this evening—and, after all, babies die as well. The little thing," she continued, quite in her element, while the others listened reverentially; "the little worm was almost saved by me. It was very much exhausted, and its little legs grew cold. It would not keep anything upon its stomach. It threw up the very best calomel we could give. It could not bear the smell of 'Indian physic;' and could not look at lobelia, or it might have been cured. The doctor had hardly been in the house half an hour, when the child turned on its side, struggled for breath, and was gone. What *is* the matter?"

Mrs. Atkins had started to her feet, and was listening attentively.

"What was it? Have you seen anything?" asked the former speaker, in a fright.

"Seen? No! I have seen nothing. But did you not hear a whistle out in the yard?"

"Yes, I thought so," said Mrs. Mullins; "but the storm is so violent, one cannot distinguish anything."

"Did not some one shout?" asked Mrs. Atkins, pale and frightened, listening anxiously.

"Oh dear no," murmured Mrs. Fulweal. "Who can be out in such weather? But, what was I going to say? I should like a doctor to cross my threshold with his little bits of this and of that, and—great Heavens!"

The exclamation this time was caused by something more than a simple imaginary alarm. All the women jumped up with a cry of anguish; for the door opened suddenly, and in rushed, with death-like looks and streaming hair, young Weston. He exclaimed, in a frightened tone of voice—

"Hide me, or I am lost!"

Then, though but half-conscious of what he was doing, yet guided by a certain instinct, he rushed across the room, and crept behind the bedstead, which filled one corner of the apartment.

"For God's sake, Weston, what has happened?" asked, in the anguish of death, Mrs. Atkins.

He had no time to answer; for, at that moment, the dark figure of the half-caste man suddenly appeared in the doorway. He exclaimed, in his rough way—

"He must have entered here. Where is he?"

"Where is who?" said Mrs. Fulweal, who, acquainted with Cotton and Weston, knew what had happened, and thus was the first to regain presence of mind,—"Where is who? Is that the way to enter other people's houses, and even to come into a room where there are ladies and invalids? Whom do you want? What are you looking after? The wind will blow the candle out. The people live over there, opposite." And without letting the Canadian, surprised and perplexed by her manner, reply, she pushed him out, and put down the latch. "There," she said, barring the door. "Now let us have a look at our prisoner."

Meanwhile, all the other women, with the exception of Mrs. Atkins, had regained their self-possession and—their tongues. Such exclamations arose, and questions were asked, that the poor child, frightened and terrified, stretched forth its little head, and was silent for a moment. It then threw itself back, and began to roar again.

"What has happened? Who is this man? What has he done? To whom does that dark face belong? Whence comes that intruder? And are we to hide him? Will there be any further search after him?"

All this was uttered in such a Babel of sounds, that each woman could hardly hear her neighbour's question, much less her answer.

Somebody touched the latch outside, and immediately afterwards there was a knock at the door.

"Who is that knocking so late? and what do you want?" asked the widow Fulweal, assuming once more the office of a spokesman, which the others readily relinquished to her. "Don't you know that there is a sick child here?"

"Ladies, you will allow me to ask one question," said the voice outside, which Mrs. Atkins, horror-stricken, recognised as Brown's. "Has a young man taken refuge in this room?"

Mrs. Fulweal, before replying, looked round the circle of her companions. Their hearts were all in favour of Weston, and they were quite resolved not to give him up, whatever he might have done. A general nodding of heads responded to Mrs. Fulweal's searching look; and that latter dame, as deputy speaker of the fortress, wishing to avoid a direct untruth, thought better to look for some other way of escape. She therefore began to play the part of the injured woman, and with her shrill and sharp voice exclaimed, quite indignantly—

"Now, I wonder what they can be looking for here? This is hardly the time or the weather for tomfoolery. We are just going to bed, and don't wish to be disturbed. Good night, sir."

The parleying was thus broken off, and the inquirer silenced. At least, he seemed to have abandoned the attempt to get any more information on the subject, and left the door. For several minutes, Mrs. Fulweal and the

others listened with beating hearts. No further sound was heard—everything was quiet and still as the grave. The widow Fulweal was about proceeding on tiptoe to the fugitive, who kept behind the bedstead, when her attention, as well as that of the other women, was directed towards Mrs. Atkins. That lady kept holding on to the back of her chair, and was evidently making violent exertions to maintain the command of her feelings. She struggled for some time; but at last her courage forsook her, and she would have fallen to the ground, had not the women caught her in their arms. The frightful nature of her situation struck her the moment she heard the voice of the leader of the Regulators; and fearing the worst, being fully aware of the guilt of her husband, she could hold up no longer. Her body was, moreover, exhausted by watching and anxiety, and she sank at once beneath this last blow.

The noise and confusion outside was terrible. Curtis had hardly given his friend warning, and both the men had taken up their post at the two doors, when a jump was heard at the porch between the two houses, and almost at the same moment Atkins rushed in, his eyes flashing wildly, and his hair streaming from his head. He knew that the two men were in league with his opponents; but he also knew that without weapons in the middle of the forest he was lost, and he therefore came to procure weapons at any risk—even at that of his own life. Relying upon the effect of the first surprise, he opened the door and dashed into the room. At a glance he perceived that his rifles were in the grasp of his enemies; but the bed was unoccupied, and with a shout of triumph he rushed towards it, drew forth the pistols, and rushed to the door, holding the weapons at full cock against Cook, evidently with a view of keeping him back and of opening a path for himself. The latter did not move, and Atkins, not hesitating to sacrifice the life of another to save his own, pulled the trigger.

Fearful was his surprise and dismay on finding that on which he had placed his only hope, a useless weapon. The trigger fell with a dead, heavy sound, and his hand relaxed its grasp of the treacherous weapon. Flight was now his sole chance; he must away!

Atkins looked wildly at the door by which he had en-

tered, and caught sight at that moment of his pursuers. Cook and Curtis rushed upon him, and bound him with strong cords.

"Where is the other man?" asked Brown. "Does anybody know?"

"He rushed into the other house," replied the Canadian. "I saw him go in with my own eyes. But the females will not give him up."

"Then I will see whether they will refuse me admittance," replied the leader, as he stepped to the opposite door.

Of his success we have already had a glimpse. Without losing further time and trouble, he at once took measures to seize the fugitive whenever he might attempt to continue his flight into the forest, which he would of course do before break of day.

"Gentlemen," said Brown, addressing his friends, "that fellow must not be allowed to escape. He is certainly one of the band; and who knows whether he is not one of the murderers, or how far he is implicated in the crimes that have been committed? Let us therefore surround the house and keep a good watch, but be quiet about it, so as to make him believe the way of escape is still open. Has the mulatto been caught?"

"No," said Barill; "the scoundrel must have escaped through the wood. I cannot tell how he managed to get away."

"That's bad—a very bad job," Brown observed. "He will make a noise. But it can't be helped now. We have discovered their secret hiding-place, and for the rest we must trust to our good luck. Now, gentlemen, to your posts; the rain has ceased, and the wind will soon dry our clothes. Take the prisoner to the fire, Cook; he is very wet."

"Well," said Cook, as he helped Curtis to execute this order, "it is but fair that we who are dry should take the watch outside, while Stevenson and his son can remain here at the fire guarding the prisoner. We are under great obligations to those two men, and I should be sorry if they were to be laid up from exposure to the wet."

"Very well," replied Brown; "that is but fair. Where are they?"

The Stevensons—father and son—stepped into the room

to undertake their fresh duty. This was indeed an agreeable change for them. The other men went to their posts; and Brown, who had been conversing in an undertone with the elder Stevenson, was about to follow them, when he drew back from the door with a start. In the porch, with a wild expression on his dark features, stood the Indian.

"Assowaum!" Brown exclaimed, with joyous surprise, "you have come at last! We have been doing your work for you in the meantime."

"Why have you taken this man prisoner?" asked the Indian, in an undertone, pointing to Atkins with his hand, in which he held a bow and several arrows.

"He was the receiver of the stolen horses; but you will learn all about it to-morrow. Have you only just returned?"

"No; I have made a prisoner."

"Whom? and where?"

"Johnson. I took him out there in the forest."

"Have you any proofs of his guilt?"

"He knew that some one was upon his trail, and he was afraid. Do you know these weapons? The arrows are poisoned. With these in his hand, he crept up to Assowaum's night encampment, and sought to take his life."

"A plague upon him! Have you bound him fast? He cannot get away?"

Assowaum smiled, and replied in a whisper—"Those whom Assowaum fastens will not escape."

"Where have you been all this long time? Some people here spread the report that you had an interest in keeping away."

"You placed no reliance in reports," replied the Indian. "Can my brother fancy that I have been idle all this time? I have discovered Heathcott's murderers."

"You have? Well, who are they? Speak!" exclaimed Brown, quite excited.

"Johnson and Rowson!" said the Indian, in an undertone.

"Rowson! By Heavens! that is impossible," Brown exclaimed, starting back. "That would be horrible—Rowson a murderer!"

"Johnson and Rowson!" Assowaum repeated, in a low

tone, but firmly and decidedly. "The pale man also assisted in stealing the horses."

"Man! are you sure of what you say?" exclaimed Brown, writhing at the idea of Marion's being in the hands of such a culprit. "Have you any proofs of such frightful accusations?"

"The pale man has assisted in stealing the horses. I know it for certain; and his hands are stained with blood. He is a murderer!"

"Heavens! Assowaum, do you know whom you are accusing?"

"The Methodist preacher," replied the Indian, doggedly. "I half suspect that he too crushed the Flower of the Prairies. In vain has Assowaum hitherto examined the spot where the deed was committed. About his having killed Heathcott, there can be no doubt; I have known that these last four days."

"And why did you not come and tell me?"

"If the white men found him guilty of that one murder," said Assowaum, smiling, in a wild, almost ghastly manner, "they would not care about inquiring into the other affair. They would hang him; and thus Assowaum's revenge would escape from him and pass into the hands of others. Assowaum is a man, and he will take his own revenge himself."

"Where is your prisoner?"

"In the forest. He thought of finding a chief asleep. Did my brother ever see a panther asleep?"

"Then we must——What is that? It is the third time that a noise like the cry of an owl has been heard, and always in that direction. Should that be a signal?"

The Indian listened. Again the monotonous cry of the shy bird of night sounded upon their ears. It was heard three times, at slowly-measured intervals, and three times in the same manner did the dark son of the forest reply. But now the cry was heard no more.

"It was an owl," said Brown, listening attentively.

"Perhaps it was—perhaps not," replied the Indian, cautiously. "This man here will know the signal."

Atkins, to whom the Indian pointed as he said this, had been casting anxious glances towards the door, and a con-

vulsive trembling passed over his body when Assowaum replied to the cry. As all was again quiet, and no sound came from the woods, a scornful smile passed over his features, and without heeding what was going on, he bent over the cheerful flame, and refused to answer any questions that were put to him by Brown. In fact, he turned his back upon him, and on the man who had first betrayed him, and was now guarding him.

The Indian, with some of the Regulators, had again left the blockhouse, and a deep silence reigned. In about half an hour this was broken all at once by a wild cry of anguish, which re-echoed from the back part of the fence, just where it joined the forest. Immediately afterwards, Wilson and Barill brought Weston in a prisoner: he had fallen into the trap laid for him, by attempting to secure his flight.

Soon afterwards, Assowaum made his appearance, with two of the Regulators. They thrust Johnson, pale and trembling, into the room. Right opposite to him stood Harfield, whose fierceness of character has been previously noticed.

"After all, then, sir, we were not far wrong," he remarked, measuring his adversary with a glance. "After all, it appears that you are one of the band. You are in rather a desperate position. Who captured that man?"

"The Indian," replied Cook, pointing to him.

"Oh, Assowaum!" cried Harfield, who had not been before aware of the Indian's presence. "That's right, you are here again; I am glad that you bring with you such unmistakeable proofs of goodwill. Hang it, Assowaum, if ever you want me to do you a good turn for that service, you have only to ask me. I should not think too much of five hundred dollars. Here, take my rifle; I know yours is getting rather used up;—take it, and may it serve you as well as it has served me. And you, fellow," he continued, addressing the trembling criminal, "this time you shall not escape the punishment you deserve. When we met last, you were precious proud and indignant. At present things seem to have changed. Only look how the scoundrel trembles; his knees can hardly support him."

"A plague upon you!" replied Johnson, drawing himself up to his full height. "You may bind me, and Lynch me,

You are a precious set, and, just like a pack of hounds, fall all of you upon one man."

Harfield was about to reply, but Brown stopped him, saying—

"Let him alone ; he may boast or scold, just as he pleases—we shall still keep him prisoner : the testimony of the Indian, whom he wished to surprise and to murder, is sufficient. That's one cause of indictment ; the rest will soon follow. As soon as we have secured his associates, the Court—namely, our Court—will take further proceedings. Our next measure is to endeavour to find their second hiding-place. Who knows the way?"

"I do," said Assowaum ; "but does my brother believe that the bear will return to its den when he scents the track of the hunter at its entrance ? The imitation of the owl's cry was meant for the inhabitants of this place ; we did not know how to answer it properly. Those rascals have been warned, and will not be easily found."

"You may be right, Assowaum," said Brown ; "but we must make the experiment, and our next task will be to endeavour to find that—I mean the other man whom you think guilty. To tell you the truth, I can scarcely believe that your suspicions in this matter are well founded."

"Who is the other man of whom the Indian speaks?" asked Stevenson.

"You shall see him to-morrow," Brown replied, evading the question. "But, my dear Mr. Stevenson, you will remain with us until we have finished this affair, will you not? You must see how we execute justice here in Arkansas."

"I shall remain here, of course," replied the old man, giving Brown a hearty shake of the hand.

"The female part of your family can, in the meantime, look upon my home as their own," said Heinze. "Cook told me they were squatting about a quarter of a mile from my house: I will go there to-morrow morning, and conduct them home myself. When is our Court to be held?"

"On Monday morning."

"And where?"

"In the forest, just below Wiswill's mill, where the steep rock overhangs the river. There is an open space at the top, and we will bring all the prisoners there."

"For whom are you still looking?" asked Harfield.

"Cotton and Rowson."

"Rowson? the preacher? the Methodist?" they all exclaimed, with amazement.

"The Methodist preacher," replied Brown, in an undertone.

"And who accuses him?" asked Mullins.

"Assowaum," replied the leader of the Regulators, pointing to the Indian, whose dark form was visible before the chimney, while his eyes met the inquiring glances of the company with firmness.

"There is blood upon his hand," he replied at last, after a short pause. "There is blood upon his trail; and neither the waters of the Petite-Jeanne, nor those of the Fourche-la-Fave, could wash the stains out."

"And to-morrow morning he means to marry old Roberts's daughter," exclaimed Cook. "It is impossible. The Indian must be mistaken."

"That pious Rowson!" uttered Mullins, quite aghast with surprise.

"Talking is of no use," said Brown, resolutely; "we must act. If this is nothing more than a vague suspicion, then Mr. Rowson, in justice to his own fair fame, will be glad to have it cleared up as quickly as possible. Before we pursue our researches, we must secure those confederates who are most likely in the neighbourhood, and may have received warning. Let Assowaum direct us to Johnson's hut, and thence we will proceed to Rowson's dwelling. I dare say we shall get there early in the morning."

"There must be some mistake," Mullins observed. "The Indian, after all, is but a man."

"For weeks together Assowaum has examined the tracks, and has measured and compared them," replied the savage. "As true as it is the wind that shakes those old trees, the pale man is a traitor."

"It is vain to hold an argument on the point," Brown said, interfering to stop the discussion; "he has been accused, and——"

"But by whom?" said Mullins, interrupting him violently and angrily. "By the Indian, who never was a friend of his. He hated him because he converted Alapaha. Are we, upon

such an accusation, to seize a pious man, and to wound his feelings mortally? That certainly will not do. First bring forward your proofs, otherwise I shall protest against so rash a course of action."

"Place us face to face," said the Indian, drawing himself up proudly. "Place him before me; and if his eye can meet mine, and bear its searching glance, then you may hang me instead of him. Are you contented?"

"I am," said Harfield, gravely. "I do not see why we should treat the testimony of a Red man more lightly than that of a white one. I never could bear that Methodist, and I for one should not be at all surprised if the wolf was found under the sheep's skin. He is a man like another, and his preaching does not, in my idea, invest him with any peculiar merit. If he can clear himself from these accusations, so much the better for him. I am almost afraid that the Indian is too sure of the truth of what he asserts: his bearing is not much like that of a man acting from mere suspicion. Lead on, Brown; every minute we waste thus is, practically speaking, irreparably lost."

"And what is to be done with these prisoners in the meantime?" asked Cook, pointing to Atkins, Weston, and Johnson.

"The best thing will be, to get them away from this place this very night," said Brown.

"The house is full of women; Mrs. Atkins cannot, therefore, be in want of assistance. Yet where, after all, shall we take them?"

"To my place," said Wilson. "Curmales, I am sure, will not refuse to receive the Regulators with their prisoners, and we shall in that case only have to place a trusty guard."

"I will render you that service," said Curtis; "I shall find some comrades to help me, and my rifle will answer for their not escaping. Let us away at once. It cannot be far from morning; and if Cotton really has been warned, it will be a difficult task to catch him. He is up to all kinds of dodges. Some of you lead the prisoners away, and the remainder go in search of their associates."

Quickly and without noise, the necessary steps were taken, to spare further trouble to the women. The three prisoners, escorted by six well-armed men, were soon on their road to

their provisional prison. Pelter and Hostler remained as guards in Atkins's house; and the others, guided by Assowaum, set out for the lonely hut in the forest. Here they hoped to find the other criminals, or at least to procure new proofs of the guilt of the prisoners.

Midnight overshadowed the forest; the mighty trees still waved and groaned, shaking heavy showers of rain-drops from their leaves; the lightning still played in the east, and the distant thunder was heard retreating rapidly. Cautiously and quickly, a dark form stepped over the fence that surrounded Johnson's cottage. It was Cotton. He glided into the hut, collected such weapons and articles of dress as he thought he might require, and stowed away, in a hollow tree near the hut, several other things which he did not wish to fall into the hands of his enemies.

Blowing the dying embers, he removed them from the hearth, and put them under the bed. With a wary glance he took leave of the room that had so long afforded him shelter against his foes, and with a terrible oath upon his pale, haggard lips, disappeared, noiselessly as he had come, in the deep impenetrable shadow of the forest.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE CROSS-OAK.

The Cross-oak was a place quite familiar to all hunters at the Fourche-la-Fave. It stood on the bank of a small lake near a thicket of reeds. The latter had been, about a year before the period of our narrative, set on fire, probably owing to the negligence of some Indians, and still presented a very gloomy and desolate appearance.

One of the branches of a large tree that stood near, the top of which had been struck by the lightning, had been forced into the forkedbough of a neighbouring oak, and had thus formed a rough though plainly discernible image of a cross.

Rowson as well as Cotton knew the place well. The former had sometimes held prayer-meetings there—or, as they were called, camp-meetings. Cotton had been attracted thither by

the fact of there being many stags, and even sometimes bears, in the neighbourhood. Cotton reached the spot about an hour before the time fixed by Rowson, and kept walking quickly and with agitation up and down the border of the slough, casting now and then impatient glances in the direction in which he expected his friend, and listening at the same time attentively in all directions for any sounds that might give warning of surprise or danger. The crackling noise of dry branches breaking was heard, and, serpent-like, the hunter disappeared behind the trunk of a fallen tree, where he remained crouching as motionless as the wood which concealed him. It was only the man he expected; and rapidly the fugitive glided from his hiding-place, and stepped towards his friend.

"At last," he exclaimed, in ill-temper,—"At last you have come; for an hour I have been suffering agonies."

"You must not complain. As it is, I am here before my time—it can hardly be half-past eight, and you know we had agreed to be here at that time."

"Yes, to meet perhaps for the last time."

"What's the matter?" cried Rowson, evidently alarmed, as he now for the first time observed the pale and haggard countenance of his accomplice. "You look as if you had brought a message of death:—are the Regulators——"

"I wish it was but a message of death," said the hunter, grinding his teeth. "Those hounds, the Regulators, have, by some means or other, got upon the right scent, and have taken Atkins by surprise."

"Indeed!" cried Rowson, anxiously; "and has he confessed?"

"I wasn't sufficiently curious to inquire about that," replied Cotton. "Johnson, too, must have fallen into the hands of that accursed Indian; for he went out to kill him, and has not returned."

"But how do you know that Atkins——"

"As Johnson did not return, I went to meet him, and not finding a trace of him, I made for Atkins's house, intending to tell him of my suspicions. On getting near, I was surprised at the noise I heard in the neighbourhood. Horses were galloping wildly about inside the fence; and when I crept cautiously towards our secret entrance, I found

it open. Of course, my suspicions were thereby still further increased. But I resolved to try another mode, and gave our signal three times. For some time there was no answer, and at last I heard a wrong one: only three cries were given in reply to mine. I knew that treason was abroad. I crept slowly and cautiously round the farm-house, and, with all my care, had very nearly fallen into the hands of these scoundrels, who had posted themselves in various places. Just as I was passing a corner, a number of persons sprang forward, throwing themselves upon a man, whom by his voice I concluded to be Weston. You can fancy that I did not hesitate about hastening away. As quickly as my legs would carry me, I made for Johnson's hut, hid the things most valuable to us in the hollow gum-tree not far from the cottage, and then set fire to the place. To come in search of you was then my last hope."

"But what are we to do now?" asked Rowson, anxiously, as he paced up and down. "Suppose the prisoners betray us? Where is Jones?"

"He is most likely in the hands of the Regulators," replied Cotton. "At least I think so, for otherwise he would have returned."

"Then we must fly," said Rowson; "it is our sole chance, and we have yet time."

"But how? They will pursue us, and catch us."

"It will not do to go on horseback, under the circumstances, that's clear," said Rowson. "We should soon have those fellows at our heels; and, after that rain, we should leave very distinct traces indeed. My canoe is at hand. As there is no danger to be apprehended from the side of Harper's house to-day, we may, perhaps, reach the Arkansas safely. If we get there, we shall be out of the worst danger. To-morrow morning we must be at the mouth of the Bayou-Meter; and if we once make good our retreat so far, we shall be safe."

"And what is to become of our brides? I fancy Ellen will be dreadfully disappointed," said the hunter, with a sneer.

"We must think of them no longer," Rowson replied. "A plague upon it! To be thus balked with the prize

within one's grasp—it is too bad. After all, my neck is the chief thing for me to care about; and I do not think they will stand upon ceremony with respect to it if they once get us into their clutches. It would be quite another thing if there was a chance of their handing us over to the regular judge and jury, and would give us legal advisers, and so on. Then we might look on, and there would be time enough for flight if matters *should* become serious. As things now stand, there is no trusting to chance. Luckily, I have always kept everything ready, and we can, as soon as we arrive at my house——Lord! I forgot that I shall have visitors! I must go alone, Cotton," he continued, addressing his friend. "All the tribe of the Robertses, with Bahrens and Harper, are at this moment on their way to my house. I must stop them. I believe I can hit upon some excuse or other, as I am on the road, so as to induce them to stay behind, and to allow me to proceed alone. If we only get an hour's start, I fear nothing; we shall be saved. Go to my house as fast as you can. Although I must first go to Roberts, I shall be there almost as soon as you are. My horse is a good one; and if it only gets through the exertions of to-day, I don't care how soon it breaks down afterwards."

"If you should happen to be late," said Cotton, "what then? Trust me, I shall not stop long."

"Go up by the ladder into the upper part of the house. There's the little portmanteau kept ready for an emergency; it contains all that we shall want on the road."

"And the signal?"

"You will see me coming. The house has a look-out of several hundred paces."

"After all, it is wrong of us to leave our comrades thus in this scrape," said Cotton. "Who knows but that we might be of some use to them by remaining here another night? Many of the neighbouring farmers are favourably disposed towards us, and would readily lend us a helping hand. But of course they wont stir if we ourselves begin to run away."

"The deuce take all your fine reasoning," said Rowson, impatiently. "Do you suppose that I would go amongst them now, when Johnson or Weston may have confessed

everything? I might be taken and bound. No; I will not put my neck into the halter myself. No; I, for one, shall go away; you may manage as you like."

"But you don't even know yet whether your name has been mentioned. You surely remember our oath?"

"Certainly I do. But in such an emergency it will be of little use. Oaths are fragile things; and this would not be the first that had been broken by a black hickory-stick. Did not you say yourself that Johnson was afraid of being betrayed by that red savage? The same thing that threatens him threatens me; and my case is a good deal worse. If the Indian had not returned to this neighbourhood, I might have tried to remain. But I will not be exposed to the secret revenge of such a fellow, and therefore I shall seek another retreat. Will you come with me, or will you remain here?"

"Of course I shall not expose myself alone to their fury, as you may well fancy," replied the hunter. "At present I dare not even show my face in Little-rock. No; I think the earth a sufficiently comfortable place to live in, and don't in the least wish to dwell up in the branches of an oak-tree. Let's away, then: where shall we go to?"

"I shall go to the Island," replied Rowson, resolutely. "And you?"

"Well, we shall have time enough to consider that matter on the road," replied the hunter, in an evasive manner. "Just now, it strikes me that any place, including even the House of Correction of Arkansas, were at this moment a safer spot for us than the banks of the Fourche-la-Fave. Make as much haste as you can; I should not like, under the circumstances, to sit there waiting for an hour. Every moment, I should expect to see the house surrounded by the Regulators."

"Don't be afraid,—I shall be there soon enough. The Robertses, I hope, have not yet left home; their presence, indeed, might be inconvenient. As quickly as my horse can carry me, I will be with you. The truth is, I am glad to have brought this preaching business to an end: it has become terribly wearisome to me, especially during the last fortnight."

"I hope that the air of Arkansas may benefit your

health," replied Cotton, drawing out from a thicket his bundle of clothes wrapped in a blanket. "You see I am ready for the journey," he continued, casting a shy look around. "Mind you come after me, as soon as you can:—Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" replied the preacher, as he watched his comrade for a short time until he disappeared in the thicket. Then he stepped to his horse, that had been quietly grazing close at hand, leapt into the saddle, put spurs to the animal, and galloped, as quickly as the thick underwood would allow, into the forest, in the direction of Roberts's dwelling.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CRIMINAL UNMASKED.

HARPER and Bahrens had accepted Rowson's invitation with reluctance. The former, in particular, did not much relish the affair. It had been couched in such cordial terms, that both were almost compelled to accept it. They set about saddling and bridling their horses, that they might not keep the company waiting when ready to start.

Marion felt a kind of inward dread at quitting for ever the paternal roof; and so strongly did this feeling get possession of her, that it was visible upon her features: and even the rough Bahrens, generally very careless in such matters, could not help observing it, and drawing Harper's attention to the same. The latter endeavoured to convince him that he was mistaken. Without further remark, everybody attended to his own arrangements for the trip.

Mrs. Roberts, who had so many things to get ready and to pack up, and had for a time been looking at the preparations with increasing impatience, at last, with her usual desire to do everything herself, conquered her fatigue, and, jumping up from the rocking chair in which she had been seated, turned towards Marion and Ellen, taking down, at the same time, Marion's bonnet from the peg:

"Come, children, you had better get ready, and go out

of the way. The bustle here is getting too much for you; I have a lot of little things to get together that are quite indispensable in a new household, and not easily to be found in a bachelor's dwelling. When Mr. Rowson comes back, Sam will take the two large baskets on his horse, and we three will follow as quickly as possible. You can amuse yourselves at Mr. Rowson's place; we shall not be long in following."

Nobody had any objections to make to this; even Harper gave way, though unwillingly; and soon after, the little caravan, headed by Roberts and Bahrens, was in motion; while Mrs. Roberts, busier than ever, bustled about among all manner of boxes, taking out a great mass of things, that had afterwards to be put back again as quite untransportable. She was in the act of emptying her two large baskets for the third time, in order to fill them with things that were more needed, when, suddenly, the dark form of the Indian appeared in the door, with such a grave and woful expression of countenance, that the matron uttered a low cry of surprise —nay, almost of terror—and nearly let a pot of peach jam, which she held in her hand, fall to the ground.

"Oh, Assowaum!" she said at last, smiling, "you really have frightened me, stepping into the door so quietly and unexpectedly, like a ghost. It is a long time since we saw you. How have you been all this while?"

"Has the pale man already led the blue-eyed girl to his home?" asked the Indian, without paying attention to her friendly inquiry, as he looked about the room with a searching glance. "Has Assowaum come too late?"

"What is the matter with you, man?" Mrs. Roberts exclaimed, now really frightened at the rolling eyes of the Indian. "What has happened to Mr. Rowson? for he it is that you always used to call the pale man."

"I have nothing to settle with him yet," replied Assowaum, in a whisper; "but the Regulators have."

"Why do the Regulators trouble themselves about him? He does not belong to them; he does not even approve of their meetings."

"I believe that," the savage answered, with a smile; and so strange and awful a smile was it that lighted up his sombre features, that Mrs. Roberts really felt frightened lest he had

gone mad on account of the loss of his squaw. She looked round at the negro boy who was saddling her horse before the door.

Assowaum seemed to understand what was passing in her mind, for he drew his hand across his forehead, pushed his hair back, and said, in an under-tone—

"Assowaum is not ill; but he has come here to save your daughter. Is it too late?"

"My daughter? Good heavens! what is the matter with her now? What do you mean by these mysterious words? Speak out, and let me know the worst. What is the matter with my child?"

"Has Marion become the pale man's wife?"

"No—but what is the matter with Rowson?"

"The Regulators are upon his track. He murdered Heathcott."

"Gracious Heavens!" cried Mrs. Roberts, perfectly horrified, as she moved towards her chair, while the Indian remained motionless and grave, standing in the doorway. "That is a false accusation," she said at last, regaining her self-possession, "a shameful calumny! Who is the wretch who dares make such a charge?"

"It is myself," replied Assowaum, in a whisper; "myself," he repeated, after a short pause; "he may defend himself if he can. I fear that his hands are also stained with the blood of Alapaha, of my wife——"

"Horrible! horrible!" groaned the unfortunate woman. "And what is to become of my child? But no—it is not possible; it is a mistake—a terrible, maddening mistake; it must be a mistake! It will soon be cleared up. He will come forth triumphantly from the ordeal."

"Onishin!" exclaimed the Indian. "But where are your people?—where is the old man?—where is the girl?—where is the pale man himself?"

"He will be back soon; I mean, immediately—Marion and Roberts have gone over to his house. This afternoon the wedding is to take place. Man—it is not possible that what you say can be true! Rowson, that pious man, cannot be a murderer! Perhaps he killed that Regulator, who always insulted him, in self-defence."

"Whom did he charge with the deed?" asked the Indian

gravely. "The pale man had two tongues in his mouth: with one he spoke of love to God, with the other he uttered words of anger to the murderer. Was that right, when he knew that there was blood upon his own hands?"

"I cannot believe it!—I cannot believe it!" exclaimed the woman, wringing her hands.

"I remember the day after Alapaha's death," said Assowaum, in a suppressed voice, taking his wife's little tomahawk from his belt, and placing it upon the table. "With this weapon," he continued, his voice growing fainter, but his words still remaining distinct,—"with this weapon the 'Flower of the Prairies' defended herself against her cowardly murderer, and on that day Rowson had a wound in his arm. This," he continued, bringing forth a button from his powder-pouch,—"this I took out of the clenched fingers of Alapaha. It is one of Rowson's buttons. Assowaum has spoken with people who say this is Rowson's button."

"All that proves nothing," said Mrs. Roberts, looking earnestly at the son of the wilderness. "You have adduced no proof as yet, man. I tell you, it is impossible that Rowson can be such a villain."

"You may ask him yourself, for there he comes," replied Assowaum, quietly. "Mark whether the pale man grows paler still when the good woman tells him that he is a murderer."

Before Mrs. Roberts could utter a word in reply, Assowaum had taken his tomahawk again, and with noiseless step retreated into a hiding-place—namely, the bed which stood in the corner, covered with a mosquito net. Almost at the same moment, Mrs. Roberts heard the noise of Rowson's horse approaching. He pulled up nervously. The animal was quite covered with foam and dust. The preacher jumped from the saddle, and stood upon the threshold. Had he looked cautiously, he might at once have noticed the pale and disturbed countenance of the good woman of the house. Entirely absorbed by his own danger, he merely asked, in a hoarse tone of voice, almost inaudible, where his intended and the men were. An oath died upon his lips, when Mrs. Roberts, trembling, though striving to collect herself, replied, that they had started, and expected him to conduct her to them. Long accustomed to restrain his real

feelings, he suppressed all angry expressions, and turned round, intending to remount, and, if possible, to overtake his visitors. He felt that he must endeavour to reach his house, jump into his canoe, and ensure that flight by means of the water, which, he now had reason to fear, was cut off on land. As he turned away, Mrs. Roberts called him back, asking him to enter. He felt that he could no longer play his former part; and that, even were he so inclinedit would be a mere loss of time that would expose him to the danger of detection. Still a feeling of awe and shame with respect to the woman he had so deceived gained the upper hand, and he stepped into the room, intending to take his leave of Mrs. Roberts in a friendly manner. He approached the table at which she was leaning, and on looking up was struck by the paleness of her countenance.

Before he could propose a question with respect to her altered appearance, she addressed him very gravely, though still in the tone in which one would speak to an injured or a calumniated friend:

"Mr. Rowson, will you promise to answer frankly and unreservedly one question which I am about to ask you?"

"Yes," said the preacher, somewhat disconcerted and embarrassed. "But I must beg of you to be quick; for I really must be off—you know I have so many things to attend to."

He had not the courage to encounter her glance. A strange feeling weighed upon him, and he felt as if he were standing before his judge.

"Mr. Rowson," said Mrs. Roberts, in a low but perfectly distinct tone of voice, "I have been told very strange things of you this morning."

"Of me?—by whom?" asked the preacher, in alarm. "Who has been here?"

"As yet they are but suspicions," continued Mrs. Roberts, "and I hope that they will remain but suspicions. It is however, necessary that you should yourself know what is said about you, that you may be able to give a full and perfect answer to all these accusations."

"I really do not know—such mysterious words—what can have happened?" stammered Rowson, becoming more and more embarrassed, and casting a shy side-glance towards the door as if half inclined to cut the matter short, and to avoid

all further inquiry by flight. He had been playing with a flower that lay upon the table, and he then took up, perfectly unconsciously, the button which the Indian had left there.

"Do not touch that button, sir, for God's sake!" cried Mrs. Roberts, observing his movements. A sudden frenzy seemed to have overcome her. "It is——"

"What is the matter with you, Mrs. Roberts?" continued Rowson, apparently indifferently, and resolved to bring the conversation to an end. "You seem to be very much excited. What is there in this button? It is one of mine, which probably——"

"One of yours?" cried Mrs. Roberts, in a tone of horror, supporting herself up by the back of the chair. "It *is* yours!"

"What is the matter with you?"

"That button Assowaum found in the grasp of his murdered wife," exclaimed the woman, who, before agitated by the struggle of contending feelings of affection—yea, reverence and horror—had hesitated, and could scarcely speak. Now, however, she drew herself up, as one who cast away both doubts and love, and continued—"You—you are the *murderer!*"

The preacher suddenly placed his hand to his side, under his waistcoat, where he kept his weapons concealed. Casting a hurried glance round the room, his eye met that of the Indian, who, with his rifle raised, kept him at bay, exclaiming—

"One step, and you are a dead man!"

Rowson gave himself up for lost; when Mrs. Roberts, observing the menacing attitude of the Indian, and expecting that he would instantly take his revenge for the blood of his wife, pushed aside the deadly weapon, crying, in an excited manner—

"Oh, not here—not before my eyes!"

Rowson observed her movement, and knowing that this might perhaps be the last chance of flight, with the swiftness of a panther rushed out of the door, sprang into the saddle, and disappeared in the thicket.

The red son of the forest followed him in wild haste. Before he could, however, get another sure aim at the flying

form of his enemy, the thick brushwood concealed him from his sight. Assowaum stepped back, went up to the horse which stood before the house ready saddled for Mrs. Roberts, took off the side-saddle, seized the bridle from the hand of the bewildered negro boy, sprang upon the animal's bare back, and urging it on with his heels, followed the trail of him whom he meant to be his victim.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SIEGE.

"Look you—I was right, after all; there is the house," said Roberts, as the little caravan emerged from the border of the wood-clearing, and halted before the little building. It was surrounded by a high fence, and was in a short time to be Marion's home.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Harper, in astonishment. "The trees had been marked in quite another direction. I thought his house must be somewhere higher up. We shall be neighbours, for my house is not very far distant from this, only more down the river."

"Well, Marion, how do you like the place?" asked old Roberts, turning to his daughter. "Eh? It is rather quiet and secluded—rather awful-looking! It is because the river is so near at hand, with its monotonous sounds; the bushy sycamores, the dark willows, the cotton-trees, which are still found about here; higher up, they are met with more rarely, and Smiers assured me, a short time ago——"

"It really is quiet and secluded," whispered Marion, taking Ellen by the hand, as if she was afraid of disturbing the quiet by the sound of her voice. "I do not know what it is that makes the place so lonely, so awful-looking."

"That's because there are no animals," said Bahrens. "Of course, that's it. Where there are no cow-bells ringing, and no hens and pigs running about in the yard; where there are no dogs to leap upon you, and to make noise enough to drown your voice; and a lot of geese beginning to cackle just at the very moment when you want to speak;—where, I say,

such things are not found, a place cannot be homely and comfortable-looking. At least, I, for one, could not live in such a home."

"Why should Mr. Rowson keep animals?" said Mr. Harper; "perhaps in a week he may move again."

"Nonsense! If I only intended to live in a place three days, I should have at least a few hens or pigs about me, just to pick up the grain that would otherwise be wasted. Only look what a state the yard is in! The Indian-corn lies scattered about on the ground. If my goodwife should only see that!"

"It will all be very different soon," said Roberts, with a smile. "His wife will get him into proper order; and perhaps we shall live to see the time when he wont give us four sermons every week. I see he has plenty of accommodation for horses;—there are lots of racks."

"What is the matter, Ellen?" asked Marion, as her friend uttered a deep sigh;—"what ails you?"

"Oh, nothing," replied the girl, with an embarrassed smile, glancing timidly at the house. "Nothing;—it might be a delusion, but I fancied that I saw an eye peeping out from between one of those crevices."

"What, up there?" said Bahrens, with a laugh. "That's not very likely, neither. I do not think that a guest would think of taking up his quarters there. The door is open."

"And what a door!" said Harper, opening it and stepping into the house. "It is wonderfully strong, as if it was meant to guard the greatest riches. Well," he continued, looking round him, "it really looks rather tidy for a bachelor's place, although the womankind might have many things to say against it. But it cannot be otherwise. Down at our place, too, there are many things that might be different. When Alapaha was alive," he added, with a sigh, "it used to be snug and comfortable enough; but now——"

"It will be all right again, Harper," said Bahrens, kindly; "perhaps better than ever. Brown must get married, and then there will be an end to your bachelors' housekeeping."

"Come in here, girls," cried Roberts, who had followed the other men,—"come in here; now your rule begins, and Marion may at once enter into her dominions.—That's right," he added, when they did as he directed,—"that's

right;—now come and walk about to your heart's content. In the meanwhile we will light a fire out here, and put the iron kettle on. There is no kitchen in the house, I see, and my good woman, who ought to be here soon—for in such things——"

"Stop!" cried Bahrens, with a laugh, "he is off again. Look, here are some matches; but how are we to light the fire? This is an unlikely place for wood. One has to go fifty paces for it. Well, I will fetch some branches. Is there such a thing as a hatchet on the farm? A nice way of fitting up a house, this!"

"There is one in the corner," said Harper.

"Well, then, you may remain here in the meanwhile."

"No; I shall help you to carry the wood," said Roberts. "Harper may light the fire; the wind has blown down plenty of dry leaves and a little wood."

The men set about their work in the best of spirits. The girls alone remained in the house. Yet they did not busy themselves as Roberts had expected. They remained standing, their hands clasped, both looking gloomy and sad. Marion could no longer restrain her feelings, and with a flood of tears she threw herself upon her friend's bosom.

"Marion, what is the matter with you?" asked Ellen, frightened;—"what ails you? For Heaven's sake tell me. Something dreadful is hanging over you; I have long noticed it: you are not happy."

"No, I am not," sobbed the poor girl, embracing her friend; who, in her turn, tried to free herself, in order to look into Marion's face. "No; I am not happy, and shall never be happy again."

"But what is the matter with you? I have never seen you in this state before. You tremble, Marion! What is it?"

"What ails me?" replied the bride. "I want everything—everything in the wide world;—confidence, love, hope. Yes, even hope. And now it is too late. I cannot go back."

"Marion, you grieve me very much," said her friend, clasping her in a trembling embrace. "What do you mean by this strange behaviour? You may and can confide in me."

"Yes, I may and can," said Marion, firmly, pushing back

her dark hair from her forehead. "I have but a few minutes that I can call mine. I am still my own mistress. In an hour it may be too late. Listen, then, Ellen, and I will tell you what has rendered me miserable up to this moment—what will embitter all my future life——What are you looking at?"

"Just see!" said the girl, with astonishment—"is not that Mr. Rowson? Good Heavens! the horse has run away with him. See how it is galloping!"

"Hallo, Rowson!" cried Bahrens and Roberts, who were standing at the edge of the clearing, and were quite thunderstruck as they saw him; "what is the matter with you?"

"Hallo—stop!" cried Harper, and drew back quickly, for the little spirited animal nearly run over him. "Rowson, are you mad?—what the deuce ails you?"

The preacher did not deign to bestow a word, or even a look, upon either of the men. He sprang from the horse, rushed through the small gate of the fence, which he slammed violently, and dashed into the house. The girls, with a cry of anguish, drew back frightened at his ghastly appearance. He bolted the door, took down his rifle, and cocked it. When he had thus placed himself in a state of defence he looked round the room, with a glance that seemed to betoken a firm resolve to shoot the first person who came in his way.

"Good Heavens! Mr. Rowson," cried Ellen, in agony, "what are you going to do? Do you intend to murder your wife?"

"Cotton!" cried Rowson, in a hoarse tone of voice, when he had convinced himself that none of the men were in the cottage, and without paying any attention to the girl—"Cotton!" he repeated.

"Yes," replied his friend, from the upper part of the house—"I am here. You must look sharp. The Indian is coming. It seems he followed close at your heels."

"Come down, quickly!" said the preacher, taking several plugs out of the wooden walls of the house, and thus forming spyholes and portholes. "Come down!—there will be some work for you presently. We have plenty of enemies to cope with."

Like a cat the hunter glided down the wall. He had

pushed away the ladder from the narrow space in which he had been previously concealed, and Ellen was obliged to catch hold of Marion's arm, in order to save herself from falling, when she caught sight of that man, whom, of all others, she feared most, and who reappeared before her under such strange and mysterious circumstances.

"What do you mean by that? For Heaven's sake, Mr. Rowson, let us go away," said Marion, imploringly, who began to think that she was a prisoner in the hands of criminals. "Let me go to my father—what does all this mean?"

"You will soon know all, my dove," said the hunter, with a sneering laugh, taking another rifle down from the chimney. "You will soon know all. But a plague upon you," he added, turning to Rowson. "You have drawn me here into a pretty snare. What a fool I was to creep into that hole of yours; I might by this time have been quietly seated in the canoe, and have put at least a distance of five miles between me and those rascals."

"Back, there!" cried Rowson, without replying to the reproaches of his companion. "Back, there, or you are a dead man!"—and at the same moment his shot cracked through the crevice in the wall. Throwing down his rifle, he rushed to the bed, took out the mattress, and brought forth four more rifles, all loaded.

"Wait, you red-skinned beast," he muttered. "I hope I shall do for you this time, and put an end to your spying. Back there from the door!" he called out roughly to the girls. "It is no time for compliments—back, now, if you value your lives!"

"What are we to do with the girls here?" asked Cotton, ill-naturedly.

"Keep them as hostages," replied the preacher; "their lives must answer for ours. If we can hold out till dark, we are safe."

"I do not see that," replied the hunter, with a growl, looking cautiously round, and loading the rifle from a pouch which Rowson had given him. "In the evening they will make a fire around the house, or perhaps put it to the place."

"They will not do that on account of the girls. Hallo, here comes old Roberts, alone, and without a rifle; he wants

to have his child back. It can't be done, old man—can't be done!"

The three men, who might have anticipated anything rather than the scene which passed before their eyes, had observed with amazement the preacher's furious ride, and at the first moment formed the same idea as Ellen had done, namely, that his horse had run away with him. But hardly had the man, usually so reserved and quiet in his demeanour, disappeared within his house, when the attention of Bahrens and Roberts, the one with the hatchet, the other with a large branch upon his shoulder, that he had in the confusion snatched up, was attracted by the clatter of hoofs, and immediately afterwards the Indian was seen approaching. His long black hair was waving in the wind, his rifle, steadied by his right hand, lay across the horse, the bridle was loose in his left hand, and he was stooping down, in order to make out the track he was following.

"Assowaum!" cried the men, astonished and amazed; "what has happened? what do you want with the preacher? What has he done?"

"I want his blood!" cried the Indian, grinding his teeth. "I want the red blood of his heart! I want the heart from his body!" and leaping from the back of the foaming animal, which, unused to such violent exertion, fell down, he rushed towards the fence, and climbed over it.

At the same moment the voice of the Methodist was heard, the shot flashed from the peephole in the log-wall of the house, and Assowaum fell down from the fence, over which he had almost climbed. Before the men could recover from their fright, he jumped up again, ran round the high fence, and stepped behind the large trunk of a tree, whence he could get a shot at the back of the cottage, and cut off all chance of flight towards the river in that direction.

Thither he was followed by Bahrens and Harper. Roberts stepped up to the house, firmly resolved to get his child out of the hands of the fugitive, whose mysterious behaviour convinced him that he was guilty of some wrong—although of what nature it might be, Roberts himself could not guess.

"Stand back," cried Rowson, from the interior of the house. "Stand back, if you value your life."

"Give me my child," cried Roberts. "Let the two girls come forth from the house. I swear I do not mean

evil against you. I do not even know what all this is about; but you have shot the Indian. Blood has been spilt, and I wish to get the girls away from a place not proper for them. Let me have my child."

"Back, there!" cried Rowson, as he raised his rifle.

Marion threw herself into his arms, and said imploringly, "For Heaven's sake, tell me, do you mean to murder my father?"

"Take the girls away, Cotton," cried the preacher, angrily. "Only listen, how that fool is shaking the door. It's lucky, too, that they have not tried it together, or it might be worse for us. Now to work; the girls must be bound—their arms are in our way. If they will not keep quiet, we must gag them. We have but a few minutes left, and must make the best use of them we can."

"Help! help!" cried the two girls, as the men seized them, and began to bind them.

"Thief! rascal!" cried the old man, and rattled with the force of despair at the oaken door, trying to gain admittance.

Bahrens ran to help his friend, and Harper himself, though still weak from the effects of his late illness, seized a branch, and hastened to the house, to lend his feeble aid to a father in distress. Before the two men had climbed the fence and reached the door, the feeble, trembling limbs of the two girls were tied by strong ropes, and Rowson said, in a menacing tone of voice—"If you open your lips again, or cry for help, I will shoot, like a dog, the old grey-haired fool who keeps rattling at the door."

"Mercy! mercy!" whispered Marion, trembling; "mercy!"

"Give them a shot, Cotton, but don't wound any of them," cried the Methodist preacher, stepping with his rifle to the back part of the cottage, whence he hoped to get a good aim at the Indian, if he should chance to expose himself. Assowaum, after the first shot, clearly understood that it was against him the Methodist preacher's rage was chiefly directed, as he knew that he had reasons for regarding him as his bitterest enemy, and he, consequently, wished to get him out of the way. In accordance with the warlike traditions of his race, after the heat of the first onset was over, he had taken shelter in an out-house, whence he could cut off the flight of his enemy until the Regulators arrived. He knew that he might reasonably expect them

in a very short space of time. To catch the murderer of Alapaha alive and unhurt was now his chief, if not his only aim. He felt for Brown all that ardent attachment of which his race are capable. He did not know that his friend loved Marion. Had he entertained any idea of that, his affection for Brown would not have deterred him from seeking revenge. His wife's blood cried to him from the earth; and he must avenge her fall.

A bullet, fired by Cotton's steady hand, took Bahrens's hat off his head, and made the men alive to the extreme danger to which they were exposing themselves, under the fire of an exasperated enemy. Roberts himself restrained his friends from the attempt to force the strong and well-guarded door. He represented to them that they were not even armed, and could have no reasonable chance in thus attacking the panther in his lair.

"I will go to him, alone, and unarmed," he said. "He has met with much kindness in my house, and will not dare now to refuse my simple prayer for the restoration of my child. Go back, then," he said again, as he saw Bahrens's unwillingness and unbelief in peaceful means. "I still hope to settle all this by fair means, and to learn what this extraordinary behaviour means."

With these words, as Bahrens and Harper left the yard, Roberts turned towards the spot at which he presumed the preacher was standing, and began to address him, when his former friend answered with a sneer—

"Stop, my dear sir, I have been preaching too long myself to take any pleasure in that kind of whining you are just commencing. In order to come to a clear understanding, you will do well to pay attention to what I say. This time my words are meant for nothing less than a sermon, though this be Sunday!"

"Then I was not mistaken in you, after all, you rascal," exclaimed the old man, in wrath, stamping the ground with his foot. "You are right in taunting us for our credulity in believing your smooth words. But woe to you, if you do the slightest harm to one of the girls whom an unluckly fate has placed into your hands; the very flesh shall be hacked from your limbs."

"What is the use of that talking, I——"

"Stop! don't speak," cried the old man, with deep emotion.

"It appears you have committed some dreadful crime, for otherwise your conduct could not be explained. Whatever it may be, you have still time for flight, and I will help you in getting off. Take one of my horses, and some money, but give me back my child. Give me back the two girls. Consider how kindly you were always received by us —consider that I was this very day to call you son."

"You had better accept the offer," said Cotton. "We shall not easily get better terms; of course, it includes me as well as you. I am for letting the girls off."

"Stop a moment!" said the Methodist, interrupting his comrade; "are you mad? Do you think the Indian behind that tree would pay the slightest heed to the promises of this old greybeard? Only show your scalp at any open space, and you will soon get a taste of his lead. No, by putting any trust in such promises we should only be falling into the snare. There is no chance of safety for us before dark."

"Why not cut our way out by force? These three men are unarmed, they cannot stop us."

"Does not that accursed red-skinned rascal behind that fir-tree command with his rifle the whole bank of the river?"

"What shall we do if the Regulators make their appearance?"

"I wonder they are not here already," Rowson replied, with a sneer. "A plague upon them—I mean to defy them."

"Then I should like to know how you mean to escape at night, when they are all round the house?"

"They will not dare to kindle watchfires," Rowson replied, in an undertone, "or we should get a precious good aim at them; and if they squat in the dark, we are safe. A small passage, which I and Johnson have scooped out with much labour, leads from here down to the place where we have hid the canoe."

"And why don't we make use of it at once? Can we have a better opportunity?" Cotton exclaimed, angrily.

"Blind fool!" replied Rowson; "that rascally Red-skin is at this very moment standing just over the spot; and though there is little danger that the scoundrel will discover the concealed canoe, the reeds being much too thick for that, yet it would be impossible to push it off at present, without betraying ourselves."

"But the Regulators!"

"A plague upon them! They will be sure to do what is in their power; but they will not dare to attack the house in good earnest, as long as we have these rifles in our possession, and the girls as hostages."

"Well," cried Roberts, outside, "have you considered my proposal? I see you are not alone, Rowson. All who may have taken shelter in the house will be permitted to go away from here. There is yet time—the Regulators have not arrived. Give me back my child—set the innocent girls at liberty."

"Listen to my reply," answered Rowson; "my life is in danger, and that Indian over there is firmly bent upon taking it. If you can prevail upon him to confirm your conditions, well and good; in that case I am ready to comply with them. Should you fail to persuade him, bear in mind that at the first attempt to capture this house by force, the two girls shall die by my hand."

"The Indian must consent to these terms," cried Roberts, in joy at finding as he thought a solution to the difficulty; "he cannot refuse to do so. Alas! it is too late; here come the Regulators."

He was right; the clatter of the hoofs of some twenty horses was heard, accompanied by the rustling and cracking of breaking branches. Assowaum uttered his war-cry, and immediately afterwards the Regulators, led by Brown and Harfield, appeared upon the stage.

The Indian, as they filed off round the dwelling, shouted—"Now he is mine—now I shall have his blood!"

Rowson seemed to be fully alive to the danger which threatened him of falling into the hands of this enemy. He even seemed to fear the Regulators less than he did Assowaum. As soon, therefore, as the Indian, in the joy of the moment, allowed a small portion of his body to be seen from behind the tree, another report of a rifle was heard from the house, and the blood of the chieftain coloured the earth, flowing from a second light wound in the head.

In fury at this outrageous attack, the Regulators leapt from their saddles, and rushed at the fence, when Roberts threw himself in their way, and told them of the danger to which his child was exposed.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Brown. "Marion in the hands of those wretches! What is to be done?"

"Take the house by force," cried Harfield, in a fury; "take it by force, and get hold of the wretches. Let them dare to offer the slightest violence to the girls, and we will burn them alive. If they surrender, we will merely hang them; here are the ropes."

"Spare your fine speeches," said Rowson, with a sneering laugh, having overheard these words. "Whoever approaches within ten paces of this house is a dead man; there are six of us, and we have eighteen rifles. Should you, for all that, think so little of your lives as to attempt to carry the place by force, I swear by all that is sacred that the girls shall die an ignominious death. I am in earnest."

"The devil take that boasting scoundrel!" cried Harfield, throwing down the fence-poles. "Follow me, comrades; in five minutes the nest is ours."

"Stop!" cried Brown, Wilson, and Roberts, stepping before him. "Stop!—that would be murder—murder of these poor innocent girls. The wretches, driven to despair, are capable of anything, and we must find other means of making them surrender. We must not expose the lives of those we have come to protect."

"Do you call that protecting them, letting them remain in the hands of those rascals another minute?"

"We must contrive something without exposing these girls to danger. Where is the Indian?"

"Give us leave to depart; give us at least twenty-four hours' start, and the girls shall be free," said Rowson.

"Well, be it so," Brown replied quickly to this proposal.

"Stop, sir," said Harfield, interrupting him. "We have at last the wretches who have done such dreadful things in our power. There is the murderer of poor Heathcott, and his blood alone is sufficient to call for revenge. We must have it, and cannot throw away our chance. Moreover, the band will decide upon what is to be done by their votes. Do you mean to let the rascal escape, only because he threatens to murder two girls whom he happens to have in his power? Or——"

"No—no—no," cried the men, with the exception of Harper, Wilson, Roberts, and Brown.

"Men, you are fathers, too—think of your children," said Roberts, imploringly.

"Roberts," said Stevenson, who had previously remained silent, but now stepped forward and spoke,—"keep up your courage, nothing shall happen to your child; but it would be imprudent to give such criminals their liberty on account of such a threat."

"Let us storm their hole," cried all the Regulators; "he knows his doom, and will not increase his punishment by committing a fresh crime."

"No, men of Arkansas," said Stevenson; "I am only a stranger amongst you, yet you will perhaps allow me to say a word."

"Speak, Stevenson," cried Harfield. "You have acted as one of us, and are entitled to be treated as such."

"Very well," said the old man. "Then listen to my proposal. First of all, we had better place guards all round the house, that none of the scoundrels may escape while we are discussing."

"The Indian keeps watch at the river-side," said Brown; "at each corner towards the forest stand two of our men; we are here—flight would, under the circumstances, be impossible."

"Listen, then, to my plan," continued Stevenson. "The prisoners, whatever their numbers may be, must be aware that they cannot, in any case, reach the wood while daylight lasts, and thus they have placed all their hopes on holding out till darkness sets in. By force we cannot do anything as things stand at present, for I am of the same opinion as Messrs. Roberts and Brown—that, if driven to extremities, they will not care what they do. In that case we must try to hit upon some stratagem. As soon as it gets dark we will light a camp fire here, at which some of us must show ourselves."

"The Indian wont much fancy exposing himself for a third time to their bullets," Cook observed.

"There's no danger of that," replied the old man. "With an uncertain light they cannot take sure aim, and they will only think of keeping *us* quiet—so they wont be the first to break the peace. Their only remaining hope then is the river, or the forest close at hand. I do not know whether there is a canoe in the neighbourhood."

"No, there is none near," said Wilson.

"Then," continued the old man, "they will most likely try swimming across the little river, in order to throw us off their tracks. We must, therefore, with great caution, so as not to be seen by anybody from the house, place sentinels on the skirts of the forest, and I would wager my neck that we shall catch them stealing down about twilight towards the bank of the river."

"And for all the intervening hours I am to leave my child in the hands of murderers and thieves," said Roberts, with emotion.

"That wont do in any case," Harfield observed. "It is hardly eleven o'clock; and plague upon it, I can't wait all that time to see that canting wretch hanged."

"True enough, if you look at it in that light Mr. Harfield," said the Tennessee man, laughing. "I quite agree with you. I shall find it long, too; but what are we to do? Surely none of you wish to let those wretches escape? We could not take the responsibility of such a thing; we should be blamed all over the United States. On the other hand, we cannot expose the poor girls much longer to their rage. But here comes the Indian. Look how slyly he creeps along, and how carefully he keeps out of the reach of the bullets. They are dreadfully incensed against him."

Stevenson was right. Assowaum made his way, gliding, serpent-like, behind felled or fallen trees, blackberry-bushes, and brushwood. When he had arrived at a clearing between him and the Regulators he ran across with rapid steps, and rushed into the group of men. His caution seemed by no means unnecessary, for hardly had he stepped into the clearing, when a third bullet showed how closely every one of his movements had been observed from the house. Triumphantly he swung his rifle, as if to show that he had not been wounded this time; and held out his arm, which had been hit before. His friend Brown took his handkerchief from his neck, and dressed the wound, which was not of any importance.

"Why has that preacher such a dreadful spite against you?" asked Brown. "He does not waste a bit of lead, unless he thinks it will pierce your red skin."

"He knows me!" said the Indian, drawing himself up proudly; "he knows that his life is forfeited to me—he killed Alapaha!"

"What! your wife! The preacher, Rowson! The Indian woman!" exclaimed the men, in horror and amazement.

"He killed Alapaha!" repeated the savage, in a hollow tone of voice. "It was his blood that stained this tomahawk."

"That fruit, then, is more than ripe," said Harfield. "It actually seems to me a sin to waste another hour."

"Stop!" cried the Indian. "If you storm the house, the pale man will be killed; he is sure of that; he will defend himself bravely, and some one will kill him fighting. But I want his life myself. He is mine! Wait until the sun has gone down, Assowaum will then lead you."

"At any rate, for the present keep their attention engaged," said Brown. "The poor girls will die of despair if they know that we are out here and do not hear a sign of life. They will think we are cowards."

"We must not leave these wretches unoccupied," Wilson remarked, "or there is no telling what they may not do out of spite. If I am not mistaken, that wretch Cotton is in there too; and he is capable of anything."

"Atkins's mulatto has escaped," said Cook; "it's possible he too has found an asylum there."

"Why, Rowson spoke of six," Curtis chimed in.

"Mere boasting," Stevenson answered—"nothing but boasting. He only wants to frighten us. How about that place where the Indian stood? Is anybody there now?"

"Your son has gone in that direction," said Harfield; "he will take good care that nobody escapes."

"Very well; we will again call upon those in the house to surrender, and we will threaten them with force. Thus we may, at least, keep them in check," said Brown.

"Keep them in what?" asked Bahrens, astonished.

"I mean, we shall not leave them much time to play us any tricks," said the young man, with a smile. "Who will undertake the office of spokesman?"

"I will have a try," said Bahrens, "and see what I can do to throw these fellows off the right track. I should much rather go at the wretches with rifle and bowie-knife—my fingers itch to send half an ounce of lead in among them, if one were not afraid of killing one of the girls."

"Hallo! who is that comes riding here?"

"It's your negro, Roberts," said Cook; "your wife will be

in agonies. When we passed, she looked pale as death, and begged us to save her child."

"Send the boy back to her, and tell her the girls are in safety," said Harper, "otherwise anguish will kill her. Before the boy arrives there, I hope we shall have made our story true."

"Of course I cannot send her word how things stand," said the old man, with a shake of his head; "it would kill her. I wonder whether she knows that Rowson——"

"She cried, 'Save my child from the grasp of that preacher!'" said Curtis. "*How* she learned it all, I don't know."

"He betrayed himself," said Assowaum. "I will tell you all about it afterwards. Time presses. Until evening closes we must watch round the cottage. The pale man has pointed his rifle against Assowaum like the bustards who look up to the eagle when he flies over them. As soon as the whip-poor-will utters its first cry, the sight of his gun will grow dim, and he will have to look out in all directions, and listen whether he does not hear the war-cry of my tribe."

CHAPTER XXXV.

PLOT AND COUNTER-PLOT—THE SURPRISE—THE INDIAN AND THE METHODIST.

"SAVE your bullets!" said Cotton, angrily, as Rowson aimed at the Indian and fired, just as the son of the forest rushed across the small clearing; "you may have better use for your lead by-and-by. The Indian is not more dangerous to us than any of the rest. If we should happen to fall into the hands of the band, they would get their ropes ready to string us up before the Red-skin could say a word about it."

"And if I were a thousand miles from here," said the preacher, grinding his teeth, "I should not yet consider myself safe, as long as I knew that this same red-skinned rascal was above the ground; as for the others, I fear them not."

"He has left his post," whispered Cotton. "Could we not get the canoe afloat, and make our escape, at least, to the opposite bank?"

"Don't be foolish, and talk nonsense," said Rowson, angrily, again loading the rifle and examining the locks of the others. "You mean, then, to throw away the last chance, and to cut off our sole hope of safety. Our imprudence has brought us into this scrape; and if we take out the canoe while it is daylight and are discovered—as it is most likely we should be—we shall lose our boat and fall into the hands of the Regulators without any chance of escape. Even should we succeed in reaching the other bank, we are certain to have all the band of yelling wretches after us; and you must not forget that it has rained, and that consequently our traces would be very distinctly seen and easily followed."

"Suppose they draw such a line round us that we are not able even at night-time to reach the canoe, and they resolve thus to starve us out?"

"Starve us out!" replied Rowson; "who, in that case, would perish first—the girls or ourselves?"

"Of course, you are right," said Cotton; "they can't do it on account of the girls; but, after all——"

"I will tell you," whispered Rowson, taking him aside, so that the two girls might not hear what he said. "The place where the canoe lies moored is so grown over and concealed, and is besides so far off, that they wont think of placing a guard there, especially after dark. I believe I can guess their plan; they are in hopes of our making an attempt to reach the bank of the river as soon as it gets dark; and of course were we to try that we should be certain to fall into their hands. Luckily, however, we have that subterraneous passage of which I spoke before."

"What are we to do with the girls? I declare that I feel a very strong desire to take them with us. If we have to squat out at night, they might prove a great comfort in cooking our meals and so on; and, besides, we shall be saved all the bother about marrying."

"They must go with us," Rowson replied, in a still lower whisper, "were it only to serve as our protection against the bullets of the Regulators. They might fire at us from the opposite bank, if they happen to receive an intimation of our departure too early."

"Good," said Cotton, quite pleased, rubbing his hands; "that fool Wilson is one of the Regulators; it will afford me particular satisfaction to carry off that morsel from

under his very nose. But what shall we do if they cry and scream?"

"I will take good care of that," Rowson answered, in a whisper. "Of course we must gag them. It may be as well not to let them know what our intentions are, and so we will not pay any heed to them. I shall tell them some story that will keep them quiet until evening. Keep your eye upon those fellows," he continued, aloud, "so that they don't get in unawares, and when it grows dark we shall force our way through. We have only to reach the wood, and then we are safe. As for you," he added aloud, turning to the girls, "lie there in the meanwhile, and when we are going to leave the house we shall make you swear that you will not cry for help until we have got at least an hour's start. Then you will be restored to your friends."

"We will pray for your success in making your escape," exclaimed Ellen, joyfully; "but keep your promise, and cut these ropes, they do hurt so. I will give you——"

"You had better stop that talk, my dove; it is useless," said Cotton, while he kept a sharp look-out upon the enemy from the different portholes. "You ought to be quite satisfied at our letting you have the free use of your tongues; as for arms, you must do without them, I am afraid, until evening."

"The ropes hurt me," said Ellen, imploringly. "You have tied them so fast, they cut to the very bone."

"Well, we will remedy that," said Rowson, stepping to the girls, in order to loosen the cords a little. "And how is my sweet little bride getting on?" he added, turning to Marion, who shrank from him with disgust. "Are you still so angry with me, my dear?" he continued, with a smile, attempting to put back, in a coaxing manner, her curls from her forehead.

"Back, traitor!" cried the beautiful girl, her eyes sparkling with anger. "Back! or I shall cry for help, and bid defiance to your threats as well as to your weapons."

"But, my dear child——"

"Go to your post, Rowson. A plague upon you!" cried the hunter, angrily. "Is this the time for such nonsense? Keep a good watch. The Regulators are making some move again; I almost think they mean to attack us by main force. I really feel inclined to send a bullet into that Brown—he is just coming within shot."

On hearing this, Marion trembled violently, as she strove to rise from the bed, upon which the girls had been fastened together.

"No; reserve your fire," said Rowson. "We must not excite them unnecessarily. Should any of them, however, come within ten paces, and give us cause for suspicion, then fire; and in such a case, of course, aim first at their leaders, Brown, Harfield, Wilson, and Cook. They are the most dangerous."

"And the Indian?"

"As for him, I look upon him in quite another light, and wherever he shows a bit of his red skin I shall fire."

"There goes the rascal, creeping among the brushwood," said Cotton, pointing through one of the crevices. "Only mark how close he keeps to the ground; it is impossible to get a good aim at him."

"Now, show your great skill at shooting, of which you always boast so much," said Rowson. "Send a piece of lead through that Indian wretch, and I will give you two hundred dollars."

"Two hundred dollars, Rowson!" the hunter exclaimed, in amazement, without taking his eyes off Assowaum, a part of whose body was only now and then visible. "You must be rich enough, if you can offer two hundred dollars——"

He raised his rifle as if about to fire, but putting it down again, continued—"Two hundred dollars for a single shot! Well, I will try if he comes within range of my gun."

Again he raised his rifle, but again the "Feathered Arrow" disappeared behind some sheltering tree. So rapid was he in his movements, that the other could not get a sure aim at him.

"A plague upon his shadow!" exclaimed the hunter, stamping the ground angrily with his foot. "I could as easily follow a flash of lightning with my rifle as that fellow. In good truth, he darts over the ground like an arrow, from which the vermin takes his name. I wonder what he is plotting. Rowson, we must keep a good watch upon him, or the wretch will find out our boat; and then good-bye to the Island!"

The Indian had not, however, any particular aim, and did not for a moment suspect that a canoe was concealed in the thick reeds that grew along the bank and partly overhung

the river. He only wished to keep the men's attention fully occupied. After dark he thought that he would creep slyly upon and surprise the enemy; and several of the Regulators—among them, Curtis and Cook—promised to assist him. Were they to put their threats into execution, and were the girls to fall beneath their blows, what would the Indian care? His squaw had been murdered. Nobody had helped her. The murderer was concealed in that hut, and before the rays of another morning sun illumed its roof he was determined to have him out, dead or alive.

Thus hour after hour was spent—"the great light" passed the zenith, and sank lower and lower. The landscape became less distinct, and the distant mountain ridges and the tops of the gigantic fir-trees here and there glowed like fire. The birds of prey left the leafy screens in which they had dreamt away the hot noontide, and, like the shark in the sea, passed through the green waving ocean of leaves, seeking their prey. Here and there a solitary squirrel leapt playfully from branch to branch, and when tired with its gambols, disappeared into its hole. Rabbits came forth from their hiding-places—dark holes in the earth, and pricked their long ears on finding their domains occupied by men. High up in the clear, light-blue sky, a little night-hawk was seen soaring, now and then uttering the sharp, short cry peculiar to these birds.

The evening had set in, and the end of the struggle drew nearer and nearer with the falling shadows. Hitherto the besieging party had confined themselves to endeavours to occupy the attention of those in the house, at one moment by a threatened attack, at another by some sudden movement on one side or the other.

"As soon as the sun has gone down," Rowson said in a whisper to his companion, "I will creep down to the boat to take a survey. I hope the canoe is afloat: it was yesterday, and the river can't have fallen much since then. You will keep a good watch in the meantime. When I return, we will first carry down the weapons, and afterwards the girls, after having gagged them. That must be the last lot we shall carry off from these parts. If they prove restive, you have a strong arm, and a blow of your fist will stun them. But do not kill them outright."

"Don't be afraid," said Cotton, laughing; "a little bit of

fainting away can do no harm anyhow—at least, until we have got over the first five miles. Afterwards——"

"You are speaking too loud: that forward little thing, your intended, is pricking her ears wonderfully. If they make a noise just now, it might ruin us. Should they set up crying afterwards, when they are being gagged, it will be no great harm; for then the fools outside will try to enter by force, and while they are knocking their skulls against the iron door, we shall be off down our passage, and shall have got to our landing-place."

"When we get there, the first thing will be to cross the river," said Cotton. "Under the shadow of the thick reeds on the opposite bank, we shall be able to glide along unobserved. The girls luckily have darkish-coloured dresses on. What are we to do with them afterwards?"

"With the girls?" asked Rowson. "Nonsense! don't bother yourself about that now. At any rate, there will be a home for us at the Island, or down the Mississippi. I must, however, go upon my errand. Keep a good look-out meanwhile, Cotton. It is yet clear enough for you to see if the Regulators should make any extraordinary movement."

"Trust me for that, and try to be back soon. I feel as if the very soil beneath my feet was on fire. I wish I had the oar in my hand. Look there! the red-skinned scoundrel is creeping away again from the river: shall I shoot?"

"No—it is too late now," said Rowson, raising the trap-door which hid the subterraneous passage—"you can scarcely get a good aim at him at this time of day; the rifle is not very sure. But mind you keep a good watch upon him; follow him everywhere with your eye. I shall soon be back again."

With these words Rowson disappeared by the secret passage, and Cotton went with quick steps from loophole to loophole, that he might not let any movement of the enemy escape his observation. He did not wish to be surprised at the very last moment, when he expected so soon to be delivered from all danger.

"Marion," said Ellen to her friend, in a whisper—"Marion, be of good cheer! I have got my hand loose. When Rowson slackened the cord, that other fellow called him off before he could tie the knot as fast as before—I am free."

"Oh, free me also from these cords!" said her friend, in

tones of entreaty; "I am almost dead from the effects of anxiety and pain."

"Be quiet, he's coming," said the prudent Ellen, in reply, as Cotton approached them, though without paying attention to their movements. He merely wished to see how things were going on in that direction.

Anxious not to excite suspicion, Ellen did not in the least alter her position, but looked about for the weapon, resolved, if she could get one, whether knife or rifle, to defend herself and her friend.

On a chair, hardly two paces from them, lay a long pistol, and against each wall a loaded rifle had been placed. They were kept in readiness to defend every part of the house. Ellen could almost reach one of them.

"Do loosen my bonds," said Marion, imploringly; "I begin to despair; pray don't keep me any longer in suspense."

"Only wait a few seconds," said Ellen. "Look! as soon as Cotton goes to that corner, I can move and free you; then you will take the rifle which is standing near you. Do you know how to handle one?"

"Yes," said the young woman; "my father taught me that."

"So much the better. We must draw back the bolts, and defend the entrance until help arrives."

"But they will overpower us—and Rowson has promised not to hurt us if we keep quiet and still," said Marion.

"I do not trust him," replied her friend, in an under-tone. "I caught some words which make me fear treachery in this respect too. Now, mind what you are about: as soon as he steps into that corner, I shall be able to help you."

Cotton had been walking slowly round the room, keeping his eye upon the crevices and portholes. He approached the bed where the girls were, and the curtains concealed them from him as he stepped into another corner of the room. This was the moment for which Ellen had waited. She had put one foot forward, intending to seize the weapon, when all at once she saw Rowson's head emerging from the secret passage, keeping his eye fixed upon the two girls. Directly he came out, he stood a few seconds an image of the most fixed attention.

"Cotton, did you hear nothing?" he asked, in an under-tone, when Cotton stepped forth from his corner.

"Hear? where? what?"

"I fancied I heard a noise like somebody undoing a deal-board: nobody can have come near the house, I hope?"

"He must have been a sly fellow to elude me," Cotton replied, as if dissatisfied that any doubt should be cast upon his vigilance. "The high fence is still standing, and it is not yet so dark that any one would attempt to climb it without being seen. Of what use would it be to any one even could they manage to get over? Our portholes are all right, and when——"

"Very well," said Rowson, interrupting him. "Since it has got dark, I begin to feel awfully nervous here; I wish we were upon the river."

"Is the boat all right?"

"It is; and let us be off. Most of the Regulators are lying about on this side of the house; and though they may have posted sentinels between this and the river—and I have no doubt they have done so—yet we can glide stealthily across the Fourche-la-Fave, and avail ourselves of the dark shadows on the other side to facilitate our escape."

"But how about the girls?"

"They must be kept quiet. Now let us get into the boat."

"How shall we manage to bring our weapons and that portmanteau down? If we have to carry the girls——"

"I think you had better start first, and take the little portmanteau and two rifles. You cannot miss the road; the passage goes in a straight line, and the canoe is at the end. Put the portmanteau in with as little noise as possible, also the rifles, and then come back as quickly as you can. In ten minutes all must be off."

"What provisions are we to take?"

"I have just carried them down; they were ready, and are now in the canoe," said Rowson.

"Very good! Keep a sharp watch in the meantime; I shall be back directly."

When his companion had disappeared, Rowson paced up and down the room full of anxiety. Not a breath of wind was heard stirring outside; no sound was audible. The silence of death lay upon the landscape; and only round the watch-fire, about a hundred and fifty paces distant from the house, in the direction of the mountains, might some dark forms be seen moving slowly to and fro.

"What the deuce are the rascals about?—they are plotting mischief," he murmured, standing with crossed arms at one of the crevices, and looking through it. In doing this, he turned his back upon the two girls.

Ellen stepped forward quietly, and took the pistol from the chair. She glided back into her former position, as Rowson turned round and went to the other side of the house.

"Where is Cotton loitering, I wonder? the deuce take him!" he said, adding some oaths it is not necessary for us to repeat, and continuing his walk across the room. "Should he have played me false——"

He then went down into the passage, and stood some moments listening.

"I wish I had a knife to cut your cords," said Ellen, in a whisper, to her trembling friend.

The board under me is moving," the other replied, with a start. "What can that be?"

"It must be a friend coming," exclaimed Ellen, imprudently raising her voice somewhat above the low tone in which she had before been speaking.

"What is that?" cried Rowson, coming out of the passage, so that his head just became visible above the floor.

"We are only praying."

"The deuce take you!" answered the Methodist, stooping down again, with a growl.

"I was just going to shoot him," said Ellen to her friend; "but my hand trembled so dreadfully—I was afraid I might miss him."

"There must be some one under this board," said Marion, in a whisper; "I feel it moving distinctly——"

"Lift up your foot—they must be friends," said Ellen. "The river is on the other side; and that is where the secret passage leads, no doubt."

"If I only had my hands free!" said Marion.

"A plague upon the scoundrel! I can neither hear nor see anything," said Rowson, angrily, coming forward again. "I am almost inclined to believe the fellow has played me false; but I'll show him no mercy. I must after him——"

As he said this, the board was raised, and the Indian's eyes were seen shining with threatening flame. Rowson had just seized a rifle, and was about to descend again into the

secret passage, when the heavy board under which the "Feathered Arrow" was pushing gave way and fell a little aside. The preacher turned his head round, and, in the uncertain and dim twilight, caught sight of his mortal enemy, about to avail himself of his antagonist's surprise, and to spring forward from his uncomfortable position. Though the preacher naturally enough had been frightened and amazed, he soon regained his self-possession, and prepared to take vengeance upon the Indian, who, with half his body under the floor, could neither advance nor retreat so quickly as he desired. The heavy butt-end of the rifle was raised, from which a blow would have sent him after his wife, when Ellen, with a courage worthy of an Indian chieftain himself, rushed forward and fired her pistol at the preacher. It was done at the very nick of time—indeed, just as Rowson had raised his hand for the deadly blow.

"Treachery! horrid treachery!" cried the preacher, falling back.

Assowaum had thus gained sufficient time to make his way out of the place which had almost become his grave. Like the panther of his forest, he glided out, and at the next moment jumped with a wild bound upon the murderer's breast. With a cry of anguish and despair, Rowson fell back powerless. Again the deal-board was raised, and Curtis emerged. Cotton also, just at this moment, reappeared from the entrance of the secret passage, and perceiving the danger in which his associate was placed, hastened to his aid.

Ellen had in the meanwhile run to the door, and she quickly undid the bolts. The Indian, facing the new danger boldly, took his tomahawk from his belt, and, without letting go his hold of the throat of his enemy, tried to keep the new-comer at bay. The latter, perceiving at a rapid glance the actual state of affairs—Curtis was pressing forward on one side, while Brown, followed by the Regulators, appeared at the open door—with the quickness of a flash of lightning dived down again into the subterranean passage, and, favoured by the darkness, rushed towards the river. Curtis, seeing the form of his enemy disappear without knowing how or where, naturally enough concluded that he had thrown himself down upon the ground, in order to escape the first rush, and with a view of gaining the open space in

the tumult and confusion. Venting his rage in a good round oath, he rushed towards the spot, and disappeared, tumbling head-over-heels into the open hole.

"Waugh!" cried the Indian, as his eyes were illumined with wild joy. "I am rather curious to know which of them will come back first."

"Torches! bring torches!" cried Harfield to those outside; "bring torches, and keep the house well guarded, so that none may escape. One of the rascals has concealed himself under the deals."

Several of the men rushed forward with lighted pine-torches, and Cook, taking one of these from the first man that entered the room, followed his friend into the passage. Brown hastened to her that he loved, and, trembling with excitement, was hardly able to cut with his hunting-knife the cords by which the poor girl was bound. Exhausted, and overcome by such a rapid transition from pain to pleasure, she fainted in the arms of her friend.

Wilson and Ellen formed a group by themselves, near the door.

"Here's a subterranean passage," cried Curtis, from below. "The others have escaped. It goes to the river; so some of you had better be off in that direction, and shoot at every living thing you see."

Away went the Regulators, and directly after five or six shots were heard in rapid succession.

"Then the wretches had a boat, after all," said Harfield; "and yet, I and the Indian thought we had examined every spot so closely that nothing could have escaped us."

"Are you wounded, Curtis?" Cook asked his friend, as he set him on his feet again near the opening of the secret passage.

"Yes—no—I hardly think I am; that's to say, I don't know. A plague upon it! what has been the matter with me? Where am I? What's all that shooting about?"

"They are in pursuit of those who have escaped. You are in Rowson's house—or rather below it. A nice passage, that. Well, every old fox makes his hole—a special way of egress in case of danger, a last chance of escape. This has been scooped out slyly enough; and they might have succeeded in making their escape, had not the Indian stepped in a little too early for them."

"Where's Rowson?" asked Curtis, beginning to recover from the effects of his fall, and to understand a little of what was going on, and how he had got into the dark hole.

"Here!" replied the Indian, taking his leathern string from his bullet-pouch and tying his prisoner's feet. "Can any one lend me a scarf or a necktie?"

"What do you want with a scarf?" asked Cook, who had by this time made his way up again.

"The Methodist preacher is wounded," said the Indian, in an under-tone. "That young girl there has saved the life of the 'Feathered Arrow,' and shot the pale man in his shoulder. Waugh! how pale he looks!"

"The Indian really pities him!" said Stevenson, who had just entered the room. "That is quite a new quality in one of his race."

"Pity!" exclaimed the chieftain, stretching himself to full length and casting angry glances at the speaker. "Who says that Assowaum could feel pity for the murderer of Alapaha? But he must not die yet! he must not die here—he must not die of this wound, which a woman's hand has inflicted. The revenge is to be my own, and I will take it. Who can lend me a handkerchief to bind up the pale man's shoulder?"

"Here's mine," said Stevenson, handing one to the Indian. "But, am I mistaken or not?" he added, stooping down to get a closer look at the preacher; "that man's face I have seen somewhere already; his features are known to me."

Rowson raised his eyes and looked into the speaker's face.

"Good gracious! that is the murderer of the cattle-dealer!" exclaimed the old farmer, springing up with a start. "That's the face of the scoundrel who murdered him treacherously!"

"Be off!" cried the wounded man, turning his face aside.

"Where's Brown?" exclaimed several voices.

"Here I am," replied the young man. "Can anybody give some vinegar? Miss Roberts has fainted."

"My child—my dear child!" cried Roberts, kneeling down in agony at the side of his daughter, whose face was pale as death.

"Marion—dearest, best Marion!" whispered Ellen, who had recovered from the first emotion, and freed herself from Wilson, into whose arms she had fallen at the first surprise quite unconsciously.

"Here is some whisky and water," said the younger Stevenson, handing over a tin cup with water to Brown, and a pocket-pistol containing whisky.

Brown was busily engaged rubbing the beloved girl's forehead, temples, and hands, with an eagerness that rather astonished Bahrens, who was standing at his side.

"Harper," said the latter, in a low whisper, to his friend, "is Brown a doctor? I never knew that he was so skilful."

"No," replied the other, with a smile. "Why do you ask the question?"

"He seems very clever at that rubbing. *My* hands would have been tired in much less time: his go as if worked by steam."

"Papa!" said the pretty girl, with a deep sigh, opening her bright eyes—"papa!" but her glance did not meet that of her father, though he was holding one of her hands closely locked in his own.

Her eyes met those of one most dear to her, who, stooping down over her, beheld her gradual recovery with unmistakeable joy depicted upon his features.

"Father!" exclaimed the girl, closing her eyes again, but with such a sweet, contented smile, as if she thought what had happened was, after all, but a beautiful dream, the spell of which she was unwilling to dissolve by awaking.

"Haven't you captured any of the fugitives?" asked Harfield at last, who thought fit to take upon himself the duties of leader, seeing that Brown's duties as a medical man seemed, for the moment, to engross his attention.

"No," replied Hostler, "we could not overtake them; but I am inclined to think that our bullets have done some execution. When we approached the river, we perceived the dark shadow of a boat gliding along the opposite shore. We fired at it, and immediately afterwards we thought that we heard something fall into the water with a splashing noise. It was, however, too dark for us to make anything out with any degree of distinctness. I hope that our leaden messengers have done their duty, and have at least laid one of them low."

"There was only another man here besides Rowson," observed Ellen, timidly; "it was Cotton—I suppose you all know him."

"Cotton!—a plague upon him!" cried Wilson. "It is lucky I did not know that before, or I should have stormed the house, even had I been unsupported and might have been shot in the attempt."

"What's to be done with the preacher?"

"To-morrow we will try him and his accomplices; then we shall hear what he has to say in his defence. Four of his associates will be tried at the same time. You know the plan. I should be glad if you would join us on this occasion, Mr. Roberts. Our proceedings will be much more regular, if supported by the presence and advice of men of riper age and better experience, like yourself. Who is keeping guard outside?"

"Some of our men," Cook replied; "the Canadian, and a few others. In this nest none but Rowson and Cotton had taken refuge, and I do not suppose that any more of the band are in the neighbourhood."

"No traces of the mulatto have been discovered?"

"No, nothing has been heard of any moment. The Indian, it is true, saw something this morning which made him think that——"

"He has gone into the mountains," said Assowaum; "I saw his footprint."

"Was it after the rain?"

"He must have been near the house after the rain. The bird whose nest has been destroyed often flutters about the tree for some time. That yellow man did not like to part from the place where he had found such a comfortable berth."

"Where is Wilson?" Brown asked, turning round and looking for him.

"I believe he is attending to the horses," said Harfield. "I am of opinion that it will be better, on account of the ladies, to quit this place. Yet it will be advisable to leave a few men here, that they may examine the spot closely to-morrow morning."

"Harfield, will you do me that favour?" Brown said, with hesitation, and, as the other fancied, with a blush. "After all, it might happen that I am wanted."

"With all my heart," the other replied, with a laugh. "You must not on any account leave your interesting patient, and I am willing enough to cover your retreat. To-morrow morning, at eleven, I shall be at the appointed place. You

need not trouble yourselves to delay the examination of the prisoners until I make my appearance. Go on with the business when you are ready; otherwise——".

"We shall begin by examining Atkins and Jones," replied Brown; "and I believe we shall be obliged to commence rather early, so come as soon as you can."

"Ah! here are the horses!" cried Harper. "Well, my boy, you are a nice fellow; you have not so much as said a kind word to your old uncle all the evening. You seem to have quite forgotten him in your attentions to the young ladies, eh?"

"Uncle," said Brown, seizing the kind old man's hand,—"uncle, I am very happy."

"How shall we manage to move our prisoner?" Curtis said, interrupting these sentimental exclamations and endearments with the rough business of the day. "We have no canoe."

"I believe the Indian will attend to this matter," said Bahrens. "He sits at the wounded delinquent's side, looking into his face with intense attention, as if the preacher, horse-stealer, and murderer were a pretty girl to whom he was making love. I shudder when I think of the bloodthirsty feelings which possess that Indian's mind and heart, while he looks thus dove-like. Such savages are horrible fellows, after all."

"I should not like to be in the preacher's skin at present," observed Cook; "no, not for all the treasures on earth. If the Regulators acquitted him and gave him his liberty, I really believe the Indian would spring at his throat and drink his blood."

"His wound wont allow of his riding," said Stevenson, who had been examining Rowson's arm. "The bone is terribly shattered."

"Do you think the wound dangerous?" asked the Indian, as if awaking from a dream.

"If he were to ride and catch cold, it might be,—the night air is damp,—and then the case would become serious," replied Stevenson.

"I will carry him," said the Indian.

"Carry whom?" asked Bahrens. "Surely you don't mean Rowson?"

"Yes," replied Assowaum, wrapping his wounded antagonist in his own blanket.

"Gentlemen," said Roberts, addressing the Regulators, "some of you, as you have heard, will remain here to-night; and, mind, I shall expect you to-morrow morning to breakfast. The others, who are going to start with us—as the prisoner must be carried—and my house is not very far out of the road—for my wife by this time will have got into a terrible fright——"

"Therefore, I ask you all," continued Harper, laughing at Roberts's rambling speech: "I—that is to say, Mr. Roberts—invite you all to come to my place to-night; and if we are put to it a little to find accommodation, you wont be too particular, I hope:—we are in Arkansas, you know."

"That is quite right," Roberts exclaimed, with a good-natured laugh; "that's exactly what I meant to say. Well, then, gentlemen, as you seem so kindly disposed to lend me your support—Brown as far as my daughter is concerned, and Harper with reference to my speech—let us start. Does the Indian really mean to carry that unfortunate man?"

Assowaum replied to that question by preparing to make a start. He lifted the preacher's heavy body, and, notwithstanding his own wound, raised him almost as easily as if he had been a child. Without losing another moment, he set off on the high road with his burthen. Rowson was evidently insensible, for he lay motionless in the arms of his enemy, his pale face resting upon the shoulder of the avenger.

"He is not going to kill him, I hope?" Marion whispered, timidly, to Brown, upon whose arm she leaned, and who prepared to help her into the saddle.

"No, Marion; don't be afraid of that. There will be no more blood-shedding to-night," replied the young man. "The Regulators will to-morrow decide upon his punishment. He is a wretched criminal who has incurred three times the heavy guilt of blood. The measure of his iniquities overflows."

"Horrible! horrible!" groaned the poor girl, remembering how narrowly and how recently she had escaped falling a prey to the monster.

"And where is our little heroine, our Amazon?" asked Bahrens, looking round for Ellen. "What on earth has become of her? I declare myself her champion for this evening."

"You are too late," replied Brown, laughing; "too late,

sir. The post is no longer vacant. Wilson had the goodness to charge himself with that duty, and nobody else came forward to compete for it."

"Too late, am I?" said Bahrens. "Well, now, look you, that's just my luck. I am always unfortunate in such matters, and I could relate an excellent story bearing on the point, if all idea of fun was not taken out of me when I look at that Indian. See how he steps along, with his victim in his arms, as if he were a loving mother tenderly nursing a beloved child."

"What you say is too true," Roberts, who rode beside them, observed. "There is something awful in the settled calmness of the Red man's demeanour. He is merely waiting for the opportunity to gratify his revenge. But we must not forget that he has been robbed of what was nearest and dearest to him, and that he is only fulfilling the oath he made at the grave of his wife. You were present on that occasion, Bahrens, were you not?"

"Yes," replied Bahrens, starting up from a deep study. "Yes—oh yes—what did you say, Roberts? Have you not such a thing as a drop of whisky in your house? I know your wife can't bear it; but I really think I shall be ill to-night, if I do not get a good pull at the bottle. As for eating, I have lost all appetite."

"You had better remind me again when we get home," said Roberts, in an undertone; "but don't let Marion hear what you are saying. The womankind are always conspiring together; and, if they did nothing worse, they might some fine morning turn the bottle topsy-turvy, and let all the stuff run out; and that would be a pity, for it's genuine Monongahela, I can assure you."

"Do you know, Roberts, of what the preacher in his enemy's arms reminds me?"

"I can't guess what you mean."

"The Pawnees have a tradition that a Spanish trader, with the corpse of an Indian woman he has rendered unhappy, is bound on the back of a horse, and condemned to ride over the prairies with her for all eternity. I do not think our preacher will, for the remainder of his life, see anything else but the Indian's eye resting upon him."

"Come, Bahrens, we will ride on, in order to set my wife's mind at ease, and to prepare quarters," said Roberts; "and thus we shall get away from this awful spectacle."

The two men galloped on before the rest of the company, and as the light from the torches which they carried illumined the faces of the preacher and the Indian, they perceived that Assowaum was watching his victim with an anxious look. After gazing at him with intense interest for some moments, he drew himself up with an air of proud satisfaction, and stepped forward as if in triumph. He had ascertained that his victim was still alive.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE COURT OF THE REGULATORS.

THE place which had been chosen for the meeting of the Regulators was this time a little nearer to the Fourche-la-Fave settlements than upon the last occasion. It was situated on a steep hill or "bluff," which rose almost perpendicularly from the southern bank of the river, and was encompassed both on the east and the west by the lower ground of the valley and a dense reed-thicket.

About a mile lower down, the road crossed the river. It was the very road at which the Regulators were some time before thrown off the right scent by Rowson's cunning. The little deserted hut too, in which Alapaha had fallen under the blows of her treacherous friend, stood, as the reader will remember, scarcely half a mile distant, in a straight line from the road.

That rugged mountain-top was generally still and deserted. For many miles around—at least, on this side of the river—no farm was to be found; and seldom indeed did a solitary hunter come near the spot. The place, however, on the eventful day to which we now refer, presented quite an animated picture. Under the tall pine-trees and the wide-spreading oaks sat, squatting around different watch-fires, some twenty powerful-looking hunters and farmers, most of them genuine backwoodsmen. They were engaged in preparing and enjoying their breakfasts, and the blue smoke ascended slowly through the interlacing boughs, just as it did in those earlier times when the tribe of aborigines—who gave the land its name, the *Arkansas*—dwelt within those beautiful mountain-ranges.

Such camps are met with often enough in Arkansas, and indeed in all the western forests of the United States. Yet this one bore a distinguishing feature, and contained two groups, differing essentially in their appearance and their whole bearing—the one, free, easy, and careless; the other consisting of malefactors with their limbs bound.

On one side were the prisoners Atkins, Johnson, Weston, and Jones, guarded by two of the backwoodsmen standing near them, leaning upon their long rifles. The other group consisted of but two persons—the preacher and the Indian. Beneath a roof of flowers, on a couch of leaves carefully heaped together by the Indian, and covered with warm blankets, lay the criminal and his fierce keeper. The Indian now and then turned away from the form before him to attend to a fire which he had kindled to protect the wounded man from the cool air of morning. A cup filled with water stood beside him, which he from time to time raised to the burning lips of the sufferer. He carefully rearranged the blankets that no cold air might get in, and thus aggravate his enemy's sufferings.

The barking of dogs was suddenly heard close at hand, and soon after those members of the band of Regulators who had taken a principal part in the animated proceedings of the previous night, with Brown, Roberts, Harper, and a stranger at their head, appeared. Brown introduced the latter to the meeting as a lawyer from Pulasky county, who happened to be in the neighbourhood, and, having heard of the meeting, expressed a desire to be present at the proceedings of this self-constituted court. He added that Harfield would not be there for another hour, and declared that the meeting might commence proceedings.

In the first place, a jury was elected, consisting of twelve of the settlers. The prisoners were not denied their right of challenging those whom they did not regard as impartial judges. None of them, however, took advantage of this privilege. They knew but too well how clearly their guilt could be brought home to them, and, as Harfield was not present, even Johnson did not think that it mattered much whether those present were judges, jury, or spectators. He could only recognise the faces of two men in any way favourably disposed towards him in the crowd, and these wisely kept back, and did not seem by any means inclined

to play an active part in the drama, so long, at least, as their inclinations might be consulted. These were, Curmales and Junnegan, who reclined together against a tree, and occasionally exchanged a few words in tones inaudible to the rest of the assembly.

"Who is to plead in behalf of the prisoners?" Brown asked, as two men from the Petite-Jeanne, as well as Stevenson, Curtis, the Canadian, and Cook, came forward, offering to act as accusers.

"That office, if you will give me leave to do so, I will undertake," said the lawyer, stepping forward. "My name is Wharton; I am an attorney, residing in Little-rock. I am sure you will not refuse these unfortunate men the assistance of an advocate."

Several of the Regulators did not seem to be much inclined to grant this favour; but Brown intervened, and assured the stranger that they were willing to allow him to defend the criminals. At the same time Brown advised him not to lose sight of the fact that they had named a free jury according to Lynch-law, quite independent of the laws or regulations of the State, and that they were resolved to carry out their own plans, whatever might be the consequences.

"You can, at any rate, defend these people," he continued kindly, to Mr. Wharton; "if there is any point that tells in their favour, so much the better; it is not our wish to do any wrong. But woe to the guilty! The laws of the State have been found too weak, and too powerless for our protection. Here we stand, the dwellers in these beautiful woods, ready to protect ourselves. Time, however, presses, and as we have a deal of business upon our hands, we had better begin."

The accusation commenced, first against Atkins and Weston as the receivers, and against Jones as the thief or smuggler of stolen horses. As no evidence could be produced with reference to former cases, the last instance alone was entered into, which presented proofs to ensure punishment. The secret hiding-place for the horses had been examined carefully, and placed the guilt of Atkins beyond possibility of doubt. Not only had the horses belonging to the Canadian been found, but also two others stolen from the Fourche-la-Fave settlers a short time before. The case was clear enough, and Atkins could but acknowledge his guilt.

Weston was next brought forward, and he obstinately

denied everything. At last one of the men from the Petite-Jeanne suggested that he should be forced to confess by the application of the lash. Against this Mr. Wharton protested emphatically, calling such a proceeding cruel and inquisitorial. His objection was of no avail. The majority voted *for dog-wood*, and thus the unhappy man was tied to one of the trees and lashed with the slender twigs of a hickory-tree, until the blood ran from his shoulders. Long black wales appeared upon his back and sides, even to the breast, the elastic wood having gone round him like whalebone.

The torture at last extorted the confession of his own guilt, but nothing could induce him to reveal the name of a single accomplice; and he at last fell down insensible under the terrible punishment.

The Regulators, excited by the blood, and incensed by the obstinacy of the criminal, called out passionately and in wild confusion—

"Let us hang him—up to the oak with him! He has confessed that he stole the horses—what more do we require?"

At this stage of the proceedings, Brown interfered, declaring that it would be against the rules they had agreed upon, namely, that all the defendants were to be heard, and that the jury having decided on the question of guilty or not guilty, a decision was to be taken on the life or death of each single prisoner, or in fact on whatever other punishment it might seem expedient to award.

Jones's guilt was clear enough, and there was but one opinion respecting it. Even Wharton tried in vain to find anything to say in his favour. The greater crime, namely, that of the murder of Heathcott, was next considered. The prosecutors against Johnson and Rowson were in this instance Curtis and the storekeeper Hartfort, who had been sent for at the instigation of the Indian. Hartfort had only a few days before received by some one whose connexion with Rowson could be traced, one of those bank-notes which he remembered having seen in Heathcott's possession. It was from the Louisiana State Bank, and had been endorsed by one of its holders. Johnson's and Rowson's footprints had been compared by the Indian with those marked upon his tomahawk, with which they had been found to agree completely.

"Moreover, the fact that Johnson tried to murder the Indian," said Brown, "speaks volumes."

"Of what use is it to trifle away our time with further accusations," cried some one from the crowd. "The scoundrel deserves hanging for that murder alone. If the jury really find him not guilty of that crime—a result which seems very improbable—there will then be time enough to spare to try him for the other murder."

At this juncture Wharton was about to come forward in order to attempt to set up some defence for the man who stood thus gravely accused. Before he could, however, begin his arguments, Johnson started up, in spite of the cords by which his arms were bound, and exclaimed in a tone of defiance—

"Spare yourself the trouble of these arguments. These scoundrels are resolved, come what may, to see me hanged, and nothing can change their determination. A plague upon them: I will not at least gratify them by trembling and retracting. Ye are arrant cowards, all of you, who fall twenty of you upon a single man; I did shoot that fellow Heathcott, and I should only be too glad to cut all your throats at one stroke."

"Away with him to the oak-tree—away with him—hang the wretch!" cried the greater number of the men, and several of them made a rush at the prisoner. Brown again stepped between them, exclaiming—

"Stop! order! men of Arkansas, we must first hear what the preacher has to say; the jury will then decide upon their case."

"Very well; bring Rowson forth—bring that preaching fellow!" cried the crowd, again retreating a little, so as to leave the middle space open.

When he heard his name from the lips of the infuriated crowd, Rowson started up, terrified and pale as death. It was, however, in vain that he tried to keep his feet; his limbs were completely paralysed by the fetters. Assowaum loosened them, and helped to support his enemy, already much weakened by loss of blood and mental anxiety. In spite of all this, his legs refused their office; they trembled violently, and his knees knocked together. In fact, he would have fallen to the ground again, had not his careful guardian seized him in his arms, and having given him a few moments

to recover himself, led him before the jury, who were sitting upon the greensward.

"Jonathan Rowson," said Brown, seriously and gravely addressing the prisoner; "you stand before your judges. You have been accused——"

"Stop—stop—say nothing more," muttered Rowson, in a scarcely audible tone of voice. His eyes glanced wildly and anxiously round the circle of the assembled Regulators and their friends; "do not trouble yourselves to proceed any further. You shall not—you must not—accuse me. I will confess everything—I will reveal all, as 'State's evidence;' you cannot harm me. I shall thereby constitute myself one of the legal authorities. I will——"

"A plague upon your cowardly, miserable soul!" cried Johnson, highly incensed; "look you how the wretch trembles!"

"If you open your mouth again without being asked," cried Hostler, who performed the office of sheriff, "I will split your skull with this little bit of hickory-wood here; do you understand?"

Johnson was silent, but kept grinding his teeth.

"You must not hang me!" cried Rowson, whose forehead was covered with drops of cold sweat; "or, at least, you must protect me against that devil here on my side, who watches over my body as if he was anxious to catch my soul. I will confess everything; I declare myself State's evidence."

A murmur of disgust ran through the ranks of the Regulators. Brown took upon himself to reply; and, turning to the unfortunate man, who raised his hands imploringly towards him, said:—"Your repentance comes too late, Rowson; even that cannot now save you. Accused of three murders—to say nothing of the treacherous manner in which you crept into the confidence of the families of this peaceful country only to abuse it—you are ripe for judgment. Have you anything to say in your defence?"

"There's Harfield coming with the other men," said Cook, interrupting the proceedings; "but he does not seem to have caught either of the runaways."

The crowd turned their heads, and perceived Harfield approaching on horseback. He rode up close to the prisoners, threw down a bundle which he had brought with

him, sprang from the saddle, and allowed his animal to go free.

"Is there anything new, Harfield, that will throw light upon the case of these three criminals?" asked Brown.

"Nothing particular," replied the Regulator. "I have found this old coat, which appeared to me a somewhat suspicious affair, seeing that it had been well washed and was carefully concealed."

"Waugh!" exclaimed the Indian, who had approached the new arrivals. He pointed to the place where one of the buttons had been torn off. "This button Alapaha seized in her agony; and here—here is the rent she made in wounding him."

Without waiting for a reply, the Indian stepped up to the preacher, who stood pale and motionless. Assowaum drew his scalping-knife from his belt, ripped up the criminal's left sleeve as far as the shoulder, where the red scar, scarcely healed, was visible, which the Indian woman's tomahawk had made. Assowaum pointed to this fatal sign, saying in an undertone, almost in a whisper, "He is the murderer!"

All were silent; it seemed that everybody was afraid of breaking the awful silence. Rowson's looks passed anxiously from one face to another, as if he hoped to find in the features of some of the group signs of pity and mercy. All appeared cold and unmoved. Their grave and resolute countenances and knit brows foreboded no good. His fate seemed sealed; and the verdict must evidently be against him.

"This pocketbook," said Brown, after a pause, "was also found upon this unfortunate man, who seems to have heaped crime upon crime, in order to attain his dark ends. The sum it contains is eleven hundred dollars, which corresponds with that which the cattle-dealer is said to have had about him. The poor fellow was cruelly murdered at the Fourche-la-Fave a short time ago. Stevenson has recognised Rowson to be the man whom he saw that day with the victim a few minutes before the deed was done."

"Do you know this penknife, Rowson?" he asked the pale-faced murderer. "Can you tell what the stains of blood upon it mean?"

Rowson turned away with a shudder, and with a groan exclaimed, pointing to Johnson, "It was done at his sugges-

tion ; why put all the blame upon me ? why lay the charge of all these crimes on my shoulders ?"

" And so you confess that you are guilty—guilty of three murders ?" Harfield exclaimed.

" Yes, yes ; I will confess everything, everything. I will tell you much that you don't know—dreadful things ; I will reveal what is going on at the Mississippi——"

" I protest against this proceeding," said the strange lawyer, stepping forward quickly. " You extort from this unfortunate man here a confession of guilt, while he is still in hopes of being reprieved as State's evidence, and to be set at liberty. You have, moreover, obtained the confession of this young Weston here—or what's his name—in a manner which may be termed altogether illegal."

" Sir," said Brown, interrupting him quickly, " I told you at the beginning that you were not before a legally constituted tribunal, acting according to regulations which may work well under ordinary circumstances. We have been forced to adopt this mode of proceeding, because hitherto the tricks and chicaneries of lawyers have always turned aside the arm of justice. The worst criminals have thus escaped punishment, because some trifling circumstance has been overlooked in the prosecution, or because some witness was absent, or for some paltry excuse or other. Those who were able to pay could always get out of trouble and punishment. We meet here as Regulators, and the power we execute is nothing but Lynch-law. These men have been accused, and will be punished, if they are found guilty. Can you prove to us, or can you even hold out any reasonable chance of proving, that they are not guilty ? Can you show any doubt in the matter ? If you can do this, I assure you beforehand that your client shall go hence quite free. This, as far as I can perceive, is all that you can do in this matter. What is the verdict of the jury with respect to Atkins ?"

" Let me go," cried Rowson, in despair ; " let me go, and I will confess things which——"

" Be silent ; I will save you," the strange lawyer whispered to him.

Amazed and animated by a sudden ray of hope, the miserable man looked up to his advocate ; yet he met with no encouraging glance. The lawyer's countenance had as-

sumed a cautious and a reserved expression. He turned away to the jury, who, at a little distance, were deliberating upon the fate of the defendants.

After a short time they returned with the unanimous verdict—"Guilty."

Atkins sank upon his knees, hiding his pale face in his hands.

"And Weston?" asked Brown.—"Guilty."

"And Jones?"—"Guilty."

"And Johnson?"—"Guilty."

"And Rowson?"

"Guilty!" re-echoed, in an awful chorus, thrilling to the very marrow of the auditors.

Weston sobbed aloud, while Johnson gnashed his teeth, casting passionate glances at his judges.

"You have heard the verdict," said Brown, after a long pause, while Rowson, forgetting everything else, hung upon the strange lawyer's motions, by whose arm, as if he was endowed with more than earthly powers, he seemed alone to rely for deliverance. "The Court of the Regulators finds you all guilty, and condemns you to be hanged by the neck until you are dead," said Brown, in a firm but deep voice.

"Away with them!" cried some voices from the crowd; "away with them to the next trees; let us feed the wild beasts with their flesh."

"Stop," cried Brown, holding out his hand, and pushing those back who now pressed eagerly forward. "Stop; the Court condemns them, but, men of Arkansas, let us not act like wild animals against our neighbours. They are not all equally deserving of punishment. Are there none to whom you would like to grant a reprieve?"

"Atkins's child died last night," said Wilson, stepping forward. "His wife lies at the point of death. He was about to emigrate to Texas. I think we had better let him go."

A solemn silence reigned for some moments. Atkins, with tearless eyes, looked from one face to another.

"I vote for *mercy*," cried Brown.

"And so do I," said Harfield. "I do not think it right, friends, to make our first session one of nothing but blood. I only ask you for Weston's life; the poor fellow has confessed all he has done. We cannot find fault with him because he

did not wish to betray his accomplices. For my part, I consider that a point in his favour. Do you think he will have been sufficiently punished by the castigation he has received?"

"Yes," replied the men, after reflecting for a few moments.

"But he must promise to amend his ways," cried one, in a weak, piping tone of voice.

All laughed, and looked round for the speaker.

"Mercy! mercy!" cried Jones, imploringly, plainly perceiving, by the general bearing of the Regulators, that they were resolved to inflict punishment upon the most guilty. He was eager to avail himself of the first sign, as it were, of good humour. "Have mercy upon me, too. It is only this once that I have been led astray; and, besides, I belong to another county."

"That latter argument wont have much influence upon us," said Brown. "Yet, I am of opinion, after all, that we had better send this man, who is indeed a stranger to the Fourche-la-Fave and the Petite-Jeanne, over to the Court at Little-rock. They may dispose of him as they deem proper."

"Away with him," cried some among the crowd. "Deliver him up to the sheriff."

"Gentlemen," said Curtis, "I have some doubts about the propriety of such a decision. The fellow has done his best to injure us seriously, and if they put him into the House of Correction at Little-rock, and he afterwards makes his escape, as he will do as a matter of course, he will laugh at us into the bargain."

"On my honour, I will not," cried Jones, anxiously, as he seemed to perceive mischief brewing.

"That pledge is not of any great value," Curtis replied. "No, I propose that we first make him better acquainted with our different species of wood—hickory and dogwood. In that case, he will always preserve a friendly and lasting remembrance of our little river."

"Curtis is right," said Brown; "and really, in my opinion, this Jones, if not quite so bad as Rowson, is yet one of the greatest rascals under the sun. If, therefore, the men of Arkansas think fit, that negro may give him fifty lashes."

"Gentlemen!" cried Jones, in imploring accents.

"Fifty are rather too little," Barill observed, after the

others had given their consent; "at any rate we might select some better man to inflict the punishment than that negro, I should not half trust him for such work."

"Stop!" cried the Canadian, interrupting them. "I will give him the lashes—I am in his debt."

"Mercy! mercy!" cried Jones, who dreaded the manner in which he knew that this half-savage would belabour his back.

"You are experiencing mercy at our hands," said Brown, turning away. "In justice to society, you ought to be hanged. Away with him!"

"And what about Johnson and Rowson?" asked Harfield, casting an inquiring glance around the circle, as the Canadian led the weeping Jones aside.

"*Death!*" each one answered with determination.

"Sir, if you mean to save me," said Rowson in a whisper to the strange lawyer, "now is the time. You do not know these Regulators——"

"Be silent, and trust in me," said the lawyer, in as low a voice as possible, cautiously assuming an air of indif ference.

Rowson's face turned deadly pale.

Wilson had, in the meantime, cut the cords by which Atkins was bound, and offered him his horse to ride home on. The unfortunate old man nodded his thanks, undid the horse's bridle from the branch where it was fastened and prepared to mount. Suddenly an idea seemed to flash across his mind, and he stood still with his head bent over the saddle. Rousing himself, he returned, and held out his hand in silence, first to Wilson, then to Brown, and last of all to Harfield. He pressed their hands gratefully, leapt into the saddle, and galloped with great speed to his former home.

Brown gazed after him for some time, and then said to Wilson—"Mercy will not be thrown away upon that man—I should not wonder if Atkins became quite an honest man."

"Save me, or else it will be too late," whispered Rowson again, already experiencing the pangs of death. "You have promised to save me, and you must keep your word."

"Lead the prisoners to their doom," said Brown, in a low, yet firm tone of voice.

"Stop!" cried the lawyer, stepping forward. "Stop! in

the name of the law! these criminals are guilty of death, it is true; but I protest against this proceeding, which would be even worse murder than those which these men seem to have committed. Deliver them up to me, and I will become their accuser before the judges of the State; but here——"

"Lead them to their doom," Brown repeated, without paying further attention to the lawyer's interference. "Has either prisoner anything to say?"

"I will disclose everything," cried Rowson. "Only listen to me; I will disclose everything, if you will grant me my life. I will work in prison, but spare my life—only my life! I have awful things to disclose."

"Your life is forfeited," replied Brown, unmoved. "You had better prepare for death."

"Stand back!" cried the miserable man, as several of the Regulators approached to lay hold of him. "Stand back! my life may be forfeited to the law—but I—but you——"

"Stop!" said the Indian, who hitherto, like a panther about to make its spring, had been crouching beside the preacher. "Stop," and as he uttered the words he drew himself up to his full height, and laid his hand upon the murderer's shoulder, while the latter trembled at his touch.

"This man is mine. You have found him guilty; I will be his executioner."

"No, no, no!" cried the Methodist, in agony. "No, anything but that!—away! away! Come, Regulators, take me away!—you may hang me!—hang me here on this tree! No, not here—a little farther off—a hundred paces at least—half a mile—but do not give me up into the hands of this Satan. Help! help!"

Assowaum, without waiting for any reply, tied his victim's arms with the leathern thong he always carried with him; and took him, in spite of his resistance, like a baby in his arms.

"Gentlemen, this is horrible!" said the strange lawyer. "You cannot mean to allow that savage to carry the man into the forest, and there to torture him to death?"

None of the Regulators answered a syllable: all looked in amazement and awe at the Indian, whose features, calm and unmoved, did not in the least betray what was passing in his mind. Even Johnson seemed for the moment to have lost all sense of his own situation.

"Mercy!" cried Rowson. "I will be killed according to Lynch-law by you, but not by this Indian. Mercy!—save me from this demon who has seized me!"

The Indian stepped out of the circle of the men, and went along the footpath which led into the lower grounds and towards the river.

"No; that at least I cannot allow!" cried the stranger, as he followed the chief, resolved, if possible, to save the miserable man.

Assowaum, hearing a step behind him, turned round, and said, in a threatening tone of voice—"Follow me but one step more on my dark path, and you will never return to your people. I know you."

"Save me!" cried Rowson, piteously; "save me! as you hope to be saved one day!"

Assowaum turned away, and in a moment had disappeared with his victim in the thicket. Wharton remained rooted to the spot, gazing with an expression of stupefied amazement, as if he had been stunned, after the red son of the forest.

Of those assembled on the hill-side, none dared to interrupt the solemn silence. Each man remained in his position, riveted as it were by a deep sense of awe. The men scarcely seemed to breathe. At last Brown stepped slowly and noiselessly to the brink of the precipice which overhung the river, and, grasping a young oak, looked down into the bed of the river. He caught sight of the Indian in his canoe gliding along slowly, and in the stern of the boat lay the fettered form of Rowson.

Jones's cry for help first aroused the men from their state of stupor. The Canadian, who did not seem to see in the vengeance of the Indian anything very extraordinary, had in the meanwhile made the best use of the time. He had bound the little feeble man to a dogwood tree, and with evident satisfaction began administering his punishment. Nor did he feel much inclined to stop, though Jones, writhing and roaring, declared that he had already received not fifty lashes, but between sixty and seventy.

Brown at last interfered, and liberated the criminal from the grasp of his executioner, who did not seem by any means particular about the number of strokes to be administered. He was resolved, as he said, "to take the taste for horse-

flesh out of that fellow, now that he had once made a beginning in that line."

Another party of the Regulators led Johnson under the tree destined for his execution. Barill exhorted him once more to seek forgiveness for his sins; but the latter only spat at him, and turned his back upon him in contempt. No word, no prayer, no complaint escaped from his lips. The Regulators, without more ado, put a noose round his neck, and raised him on a horse. The negro was sent to climb up the tree, in order to fix the rope upon a projecting branch. Johnson's elbows had been tied behind his back, and he sat in the saddle quite erect. The rope was just long enough to reach from the miserable man's neck to the branch. As soon as the horse moved forward, were it but one step in advance, his fate must be sealed.

The sagacious animal did not, however, stir, but with his large dark eyes looked from one man to the other as if it understood how all their glances were fixed upon its movements, full of expectation.

"What are all these grimaces about?" Johnson asked, half-angrily, half-anxiously, the cold sweat coming to his forehead; "take the horse away, and make an end of the matter."

He had but to give a slight pressure with his thigh, and the animal would have sprung forward; but he did not move a limb.

Brown sprang into his saddle, and galloped down the hill. The others followed. Some of them kept a sharp eye upon Wharton. The Canadian and Jones remained behind. The horse still stood under the tree, motionless. Johnson cast a glance to the two men, half in anger, half in hope.

"Come, now," said the half-caste man to the horse-dealer, "I see well enough what your intentions are. You shall not, however, spoil that poor man's business. Away with you!"

"But, pray, allow me to speak one word to you."

"Away, I say, or——We are now alone, you understand."

He lifted up a switch that he had just cut, in a menacing manner. The next moment the men left the place, and Johnson sat on the quiet horse alone under his gallows.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ROBERTS'S HOUSE.

Noisy merriment prevailed at the time when Lynch-law was being put in practice on the rough precipice near the Fourche-la-Fave; noisy merriment prevailed, we say, in Roberts's house. Marion's mother had for a long time lain on her bed, pale and motionless. The Regulators went away early in the morning with their prisoners; the sun stood high in the heavens, and Mrs. Roberts had not given any sign of returning consciousness. But all at once old Roberts commenced pacing the room with a grave and thoughtful face, Marion in tears kneeling at the foot of the bed. Ellen sat by her side silent and downcast, holding the invalid's cold hand in her own, who all at once opened her eyes. She looked about in amazement, as if she did not understand what had happened. Her glance fell upon Marion. Her daughter sprang up joyfully, and with an exclamation of joy embraced her mother.

"Child," said Mrs. Roberts, "my dear child, are you restored to me? Has that——Heaven be merciful to me; I grow quite dizzy when I think upon that affair—has that fiend who appeared amongst us in human form, has he not got you in his power?"

"No, ma—no, my dear, good mama!" exclaimed the girl, joyfully. "All is right now, since you have again opened your eyes, looking so well and happy. All will go right again."

"But what does it all mean, child? Is it morning or evening? I feel as if I had been dreaming for a very, very long time. Where do all these people come from?"

"Margaret!" said Roberts, who had approached cautiously, and taken a seat beside his wife's bed—"Margaret, my dear Margaret, how are you?"

"Roberts, you are here? and Mr. Bahrens, and Harper, and Ellen? then you did not go to Rowson's farm, after all?" said Mrs. Roberts, astonished and rather frightened. "Have I, then, only been dreaming all this time?"

"You shall know everything," said Marion; "but at present you must keep yourself very quiet, and try to recover, wont you?"

"Recover?" said her mother, raising herself on her couch; "recover! I am as strong as ever; only my head—my head is still a little giddy. But tell me—oh, do tell me what has happened! Roberts—Bahrens—Harper—what is the matter with the men? They all look so serious."

"Nothing is the matter, Mrs. Roberts," Bahrens replied, stepping forward and shaking hands with her. 'Nothing; certainly not now. Only as long as you lay there, pale and cold like a corpse, we did not feel comfortable in this room, and so we may possibly have rather sour-looking faces. Harper is, moreover, partly an invalid too. Now, then, come out with your tales. You had better hear about it at once, more particularly since all ends well, and you will soon get rid of all anxiety."

Marion had to relate all about the late events. She began from the moment when Rowson had entered the house and Cotton had come down from his hiding-place. She told how she had been bound, and how Ellen had delivered her. She mentioned Assowaum's first appearance, the heroism of her friend, and how she had at last been saved by—the Regulators. Under this general term the girl timidly concealed the name of him she loved, shrinking, as it were, from proclaiming any connexion between him and herself. All these things she related to her listening mother, who lovingly held her hands in her own, as if she still imagined that the child of her bosom was threatened by danger, and wished to hold her fast.

"To you, then," she said, addressing Ellen, "to you, my dear girl, I am really indebted for the life of my daughter."

"To me? Oh, no," replied Ellen; "my merit in this affair is small enough. The pistol—I do not know how—the pistol went off—I almost believe it went quite by itself, I don't know—I have always been so afraid of fire-arms."

"Ellen certainly was our angel of safety," said Marion. "The Indian would have been lost, if her shot had not brought down his assailant. The next man who entered the room might also have been sacrificed. At any rate, we should have been exposed to the revenge of that infuriated man. Ellen surely is the heroine of the evening."

"But where are the others—Mr. Curtis, Mr. Brown, and Mr. Wilson?" asked Mrs. Roberts. "They who, besides the Indian, exposed their lives so boldly, unselfishly, and generously for you, surely deserve our most heartfelt thanks!"

Harper, at the word "unselfishly," coughed slyly, and Marion's face was covered with crimson.

"The young men are sitting in judgment upon the wretches," said Roberts, "and had you not been so ill, I should also for once have been present at the meeting of the Regulators. When such crimes are committed, it is necessary that the rascals should be brought to justice. The old spirit has not yet died away among us backwoodsmen. Well, they will be able to do their work without us, and we have plenty to attend to here."

"But did you not say," asked Mrs. Roberts, with a shudder, "that this man—this Rowson——*

"Let that subject drop for the present, good wife," said Roberts, interrupting her, kindly. "When you are quite well and strong again, then we will speak more at length about those events which have recently occurred. Then we shall also know the result of the Regulators' meeting. But now, girls, you must prepare whatever our kitchen and pantry can afford. We hold a festival to-day. We have put down those cursed horse-thieves, who would soon not have left a hoof in our stables—why, they even went so far as to try to steal Hostler's stallion from his courtyard, and his fence is more than eleven feet high. However, he has not got any *riders** upon it; and I told him——"

"In a moral respect," said Bahrens, finding that Roberts had again completely lost the thread of what he was going to say; "in a moral respect, we have reason to be no less thankful, for now there will be a stop to these everlasting prayer-meetings."

"But, Mr. Bahrens," said Mrs. Roberts, in a tone of reproach, "will you confound what has happened with those holy assemblies."

"Far be it from me," he replied, "far be it from me to confound religion with this preacher. Nevertheless, the exposure will do good; for the future we shall be rather cautious about the election of our preachers, and for a good cause. 'The burnt child shuns the fire,' as the proverb goes."

"Hallo!" cried Harper. "It is not proper to discuss that matter any further until we have had a good hearty meal.

* Riders are the upper poles of a fence, put crossways, so as to prevent anybody climbing over.

Ever since last night we have watched here by the bedside, and begin to feel hungry."

"You shall have what you wish, my dear Mr. Harper," said Marion, holding out her hand to him flatteringly. "You must not be angry—you know, mama——"

"Tut, tut! no excuses," said the little man, with a hearty laugh. "I know everything. I did not feel hungry before, but it is coming on now. I give you due notice of the fact before it is too late. It can't be very far from noon!"

"What do you say to riding over to the meeting even now?" said Bahrens. "I am half inclined to take part in the proceedings."

"We should arrive too late," Roberts replied; "the place is a good way off. We had better wait until they return. Brown and Wilson have both promised to come over in the course of the afternoon, and to tell the result. It is very kind of them."

"Very," said Harper, with a side glance at Marion, who was too much occupied with her mother to notice the remark. Ellen, too, turned round, trying with extraordinary eagerness to fan the fire in the chimney, which was almost extinguished.

Meanwhile evening approached. Mrs. Roberts had entirely recovered; and as the weather was mild and warm, the company took their seats into the little garden, in which —a rarity with a western American—were to be found not only vegetables, but also some flowers, transplanted from the forest, and carefully tended by Marion's hand. They gave the little spot a pleasant and refreshing appearance.

Their conversation turned upon many subjects—some quite opposite to the events that had occupied them of late. They all kept looking in the direction in which they expected their friends, and their thoughts and words kept returning from all other subjects to the engrossing one of the probable result of the proceedings on the bank of the Fourche-la-Fave.

"They wont punish him severely, after all," said Mrs. Roberts, after a short pause, during which she had been gazing at the ground abstractedly. "If his wound was so serious, that's a punishment already."

"For such a crime?" replied her husband, gravely.

Mrs. Roberts shuddered, and buried her face in her hands.

"The Indian showed some pity for him," said Marion, timidly; "he nursed him with a carefulness of which I had not thought him capable."

"The Indian!" Mrs. Roberts exclaimed, looking up at her daughter with an expression of amazement. "The Indian, you say, nursed the——the murderer of his wife?" she repeated.

"Yes, in the same manner that we feed and take care of animals we are going to slaughter," said Bahrens, not without feeling a certain shudder pass over his body. "I never saw anything so dreadful as that same Indian's tender care of his enemy. The idea still haunts me."

"And you, my poor, poor child," said her mother, turning to her daughter, who sat at her side; "who will make you amends for what you have suffered?"

"Brown, at last! Here he really is; here he comes, galloping towards us!" cried old Roberts.

Marion was startled when the name was thus unexpectedly pronounced; and, having looked at her father, hid her blushing face upon her mother's bosom.

"And there is Wilson, too," cried Harper. "Now we shall know all about everything."

"They look grave and serious," said Bahrens.

"It was a grave and solemn business in which they were engaged," replied Roberts; "but they have also exercised a precious right—the right of self-defence; and that right we will guard for ourselves in Arkansas as long as we have blood in our veins and marrow in our bones."

At this moment the two horsemen approached the house. They sprang from their saddles, jumped over the fence, and greeted their friends with hearty and cordial grasps of the hands and many kind words.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE "FEATHERED ARROW'S" REVENGE.

SOFTLY did the small canoe, guided by a practised hand, glide along beneath the overhanging reed and the waving willow-trees. No sound was heard—not even that of the

oars as they rose with the quickness of lightning from the stream, or dived beneath it with the same rapidity. The stag which had come down from the hill-side to the brink of the water continued to drink. A dark shadow glided past him hardly fifty paces distant, quiet and ghost-like, yet the animal saw it not; and it was already far distant and had grown more indistinct when the shy animal startled, raised its beautiful head, stamped the ground with its fore feet, and trotted back slowly and proudly into the shelter of the thicket. The breeze had brought to it the scent of man.

Still quietly the canoe continued to glide on, and nothing but the noise of the stream at its side was heard. The eddies in the water showed the course it had taken, as they danced for a short time behind the little craft.

The Indian steered the canoe, and in its stern lay Rowson, fettered. He had fainted from sheer anguish and exhaustion. Suddenly the Indian turned the prow of the little craft across the river. A few minutes after it touched the flat gravel-ground of the shallow bank, and with a shudder Rowson, whose consciousness had returned, recognised the place. Here stood the hut in which on that fatal night he had murdered the wife of that man whose prisoner he now was, and against whose vengeance no earthly power could protect him.

The boat was on the land. Assowaum stepped out, moored it, and, standing in the water, cautiously took his prisoner out.

"What are you going to do with me, Assowaum?" the poor man cried, in a hoarse and trembling voice.

No answer!

"Speak, oh, speak, in the name of all that is dear to you!" cried Rowson in despair; "speak, and let me know my fate."

Silently his executioner carried him up the river-bank into the hut, in which he had perpetrated his crime.

In despair, Rowson turned his face away from the place, and closed his eyes. Quietly Assowaum laid him down in the middle of the hut, close beside a hickory-tree that had sprung up there. No sound broke the death-like silence of the place save the heavy breathing of the unfortunate man. It was this same spot in which Alapaha's corpse had lain.

The miserable criminal could no longer bear the painful uncertainty of his situation. He opened his eyes, looked up,

and saw the Indian crouching down at his side, like an animal of prey about to make its spring. His eye was fixed upon his victim, but he did not move. A triumphant smile passed over his dark features as he observed the expression of anguish and horror in the face of the preacher. Without making a noise of any kind he rose, took from his belt a leathern thong, and fastened Rowson's body to the young tree, by the side of which he had placed it.

In vain did the preacher offer his enemy treasures and riches; in vain he told him of money he had buried, and was ready to give up if he would but let him go free. At last, he asked as a favour, that an end might be put to his sufferings by a single blow of the tomahawk.

Silently, as if he did not even understand his victim's passionate words, the Feathered Arrow proceeded with his work of revenge. When quite satisfied that his victim could not move, the Indian left him for a few minutes. He returned with some dry leaves and sticks. At the sight of these, for the first time the thought of what he really intended to do flashed across the unfortunate man's mind. He knew something of the habits of those wild savage tribes of the west; he knew their pitiless ferocity, and he uttered a wild yelling cry of anguish, as he struggled furiously to free himself from his bonds. The Indian did not pay the slightest heed to his struggles. He might have gagged his enemy, and thus deprived him of all further power of venting his feelings. Was it that his cries sounded like music in his ears? With a smile he bent down, and breathed upon the smoking leaves until they burst into a flame. This done, he brought forth a number of small chips of pine-wood, and soon the walls of the hut might be seen in a blaze. Louder and louder, and still more piteously did the victim's yells for help resound through the forest; but the Indian kept feeding the flame, taking care that it did not diminish at any single part of the building. It soon completely surrounded, as with a sea of fire, his victim. Just as the heat was getting unbearable, and had scorched his own scanty wearing apparel, the Indian left the hut, and running round the outside, swinging his tomahawk over his head, began to intonate in loud and triumphant sounds, his hymn of victory. The preacher's cries for help and the crackling of the wood formed a terrible accompaniment. Thick, heavy clouds of smoke rolled

up into and through the green roof of leaves, and tried to ascend into the clear bright air; it could not escape, but rested upon them, covering and darkening the branches with dirty grey tints.

Louder and more horrible became the cries for help uttered by the victim. Louder and more triumphant sounded the hymn of the Indian. At last the flames reached the well-dried roof of the hut. The sparks turned round and round, as if caught in a whirlwind, now and then obscured by clouds of smoke. One more cry arose from the midst of the glow—it was a frightful, long, and piercing yell. It was the last groan—all was over. Behind the distant range of hills the sun, red and glowing, as if bathed in a sea of blood, disappeared; beside the place where the burnt hut once rose stood the red warrior, the last remnant of his once powerful tribe, singing his monotonous, wild song of victory and revenge.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CONCLUSION.

"So you have been in love with the girl all this while, Brown, and never told me a word about it," said old Mr. Roberts, holding the young man's hand firmly in his own.

Brown pressed his hand silently, and replied frankly—"Of what good would it have been, sir? I came too late, and had no right to complain."

"And that scoundrel had almost——"

"He is punished," said Brown. "But tell me openly and frankly, will you trust your daughter's happiness to me?"

"Why—the deuce," the old man replied, quite astonished, "you ask me, just as if I had anything to do with the matter. Was my consent asked for that Rowson?"

"Roberts!" his wife exclaimed, in a tone of gentle reproach.

"What does the girl say?" the old man added, with a shake of his head. "What does the girl think of the matter? After all, she will be the principal party in the affair."

"Father," said Marion, affectionately throwing her arms round her father's neck.

"Ah!" said Roberts, laughing, and astonished; "is that the way the wind blows? Well, as matters now stand, I suppose something must be done. However," he added, threatening Brown playfully with his finger, and kissing his lovely daughter's brow—"however, this gentleman seems to have been upon the track before to-day."

"And what does Mrs. Roberts say?" asked Brown, leading the sweet girl towards her mother.

"Take her, sir," the mother returned, in a faltering voice. "She seems to have a fancy for you, and I, alas! have lost the right to make a choice for her."

"Mamma!" Marion exclaimed, reproachfully, "do not talk in that manner; you only thought of my happiness."

"That, my child, is true; Heaven is my witness, that was my sole aim in all I did. The Lord alone knows the hearts of men. We poor mortals are weak and blind."

"Thanks, thanks; hearty thanks to you all, good people," Brown exclaimed, folding the lovely girl to his heart. "I hope you will never repent of having trusted your only child to me."

"And what about me? Is not my leave or advice in the matter to be asked?" said Harper, stepping forward, with tears in his eyes. "You rogue, you behave as if you had no uncle at all."

"I know your kindness well, my dear uncle," exclaimed the young man, embracing him joyfully; "and I hope you, too, will now have a more comfortable home and a happier kind of life."

"Yes," said Harper, wiping his eyes with the sleeve of his coat, and letting go his hold of his nephew's hand, as he imprinted a kiss upon the brow of his future niece; "it was high time, indeed, that this kind of life ceased. I could not have stood it much longer, anyhow. Bahrens and I had really resolved upon effecting a change next month."

"Where did you mean to go to?" asked Mrs. Roberts, quite astonished.

"Where to?" said Harper. "Why, nowhere; we intended to remain here, but to get married. Now, that boy is grinning again, as if I was too old to marry. Listen, my boy——"

"I see some people on horseback approaching," cried Bahrens, pointing in the direction of the river.

Soon after, Stevenson, Cook, and Curtis rode into the clearing in front of the farm. Stevenson saluted the women cordially, as if they had been old friends, but shook his head with a hearty laugh when Mrs. Roberts reproached him for not having brought his wife and daughter, whom she much wished to see.

"We can ride up to-morrow to the place where you are camping," cried Roberts.

"There's no need of it," Stevenson replied, eagerly. "You will get tired enough of us by-and-by."

"What do you mean? You don't intend remaining here, do you?" Roberts asked, joyfully.

"I have purchased Atkins's farm," said the old Tennessee-man. "I like this neighbourhood; and as the poor fellow wanted to get away, we struck a bargain at once."

"You cannot have had a good look at the place; for in the evening——"

"No need of that," said Stevenson, with a laugh. "If I don't like the place, Crawford County wont run away from me. If it turns out as Mr. Curtis and Mr. Cook here say it will, well, then I shall consider that I have done right enough. I like the settlers about here, especially since you have got rid of a bad lot; and I begin to see that the Fourche-la-Fave is by no means such a bad place as people say."

"Well done, Stevenson," cried Roberts, shaking him by both hands. "Why, this is indeed a day of joy. I really do not remember the time I have been so pleased. Children! why, where is Ellen? The dear girl must form one of our circle to-night."

"She's in the house," said Brown.

"Alone in the house! why don't she come out here to us? She is to be one of the family, and ought not to be left alone."

"I believe," replied Brown, smiling, "Mr. Wilson has taken care that she is not left alone."

"Ah, ah!" cried Roberts, "does the wind sit in that corner? Well, children, since she will not come to us, we must go and look for her. You will all be my guests; and Stevenson—where's your boy, Stevenson?"

"I have sent him to console and take care of the women-kind," the old man replied.

"Very good. Stevenson, you will bring your family down

here. We will make a camp here; and next week, or as soon in fact as the young people please, for they of course have the principal vote in the matter, which, if we consider in the right——"

"In the right light is perfectly proper," said Harper, interrupting him, laughing. "The long and the short of what you mean is, we shall have the weddings over as soon as possible, and then," he added, with a knowing glance at his nephew—"then a certain young man whom we all know will leave his old uncle here, mount a nice chestnut horse he has bought expressly for the purpose, and ride away to——"

"To Little-rock, my dear uncle," said Brown, holding out his hand to him, "there to purchase the land, on which he will afterwards dwell with this same old uncle and his young wife."

"Will not the governor be angry with you for having infringed the laws?" Marion asked, timidly, clinging more closely to her lover's breast.

"He may if he likes," the young man replied, imprinting a kiss upon the sweet girl's brow. "What we have done has only been in defence of our just rights;—we have annihilated the vermin that has spread poison through these splendid forests. It was our want of power which attracted these rascals into the neighbourhood, where they hoped to do pretty much as they pleased, trusting neither to be discovered nor punished while adding crime to crime. The association of the Regulators has shown them what power simple farmers can wield as soon as a case of necessity and their own security demand their united exertions. The danger is now over, and readily we lay down our temporary ascendancy that was forced upon us for the more congenial occupation of the peaceful agriculturist."

The rest is soon told. As for Wilson and Ellen, old Roberts proved, according to an Arkansian proverb, not to have "barked under a wrong tree." The very next week to that in which the incidents recorded in the previous chapter occurred, the nearest Justice of the Peace united the two couples, and, while Brown rode over to Little-rock to buy his land, Wilson wrote to his old mother in Memphis to invite

her to come and live with him, that she might pass her last days tranquilly and happily in his home.

Atkins left the Fourche-la-Fave the morning after the trial, but camped for some time in the neighbourhood in order to arrange his affairs with Stevenson. This was done through the agency of Curmales, as he could not bear to meet on friendly terms a man by whose agency he had been exposed to just punishment and well-merited degradation. With Wilson he had, however, another interview; and Ellen also took leave of her foster-parents before they finally quitted the State.

Nothing could be ascertained respecting Cotton's fate. A canoe was found on the shore a little below Harper's house. It was capsized, and had a hole made by a bullet through the side. It was supposed that it was the same by the aid of which the criminals had hoped to have effected their escape. Cotton himself had disappeared, and no further trace of him was discovered. No footprints having been seen on either bank, the rumour soon gained general credence that he had either been hit by one of the bullets aimed at him, or that, on the upsetting of the boat, he had, in consequence of the heavy weights he carried about him, been drowned. The mulatto had also disappeared. When the men, a few days after the meeting of the Regulators, went to cut down Johnson's corpse, some of them thought they had seen the shadow of his dark form gliding along the border of that reedland which stretched from the bank of the Fourche-la-Fave towards the range of hills.

The lawyer from Little-rock, as soon as the meeting of the Regulators was over, mounted his horse and rode away at full gallop. It was afterwards ascertained that he did not keep to the direction of Little-rock; and, when inquiries were made, nobody knew the name of "Wharton."

The Indian squatted for nine days after Rowson's death near his wife's grave, keeping up a fire there, and placing nightly offerings of food. On the morning of the tenth day he stepped into Harper's cottage, with his rifle and his blanket on his shoulder. The young couple were then living there, until their new home was ready. He held out his hand to his friend gravely and silently, as if about to take his leave.

"And will not the 'Feathered Arrow' spend the remainder of his life with his friends?" asked Brown, kindly. "Asso-

waum has nobody to cook for him, and mend his mocassins. Will he not accept a home under my roof?"

"You are good and kind," the Indian replied; "your heart and your tongue I know are the same. But Assowaum must hunt. The white man has killed nearly all the deer on the Fourche-la-Fave; their traces have become scarce. Bears appear only as stray wanderers in the low grounds of these valleys. The flocks of the white man fill the reedland, and in the marshes no retreat is left for the wild animal. Assowaum is ill; the flesh of the buffalo will restore his health again. He will go to the West."

"At any rate, grant me one favour; do not go far, and, if you get tired of wandering, return to us. You will always find a home here."

"My brother is kind; Assowaum will not forget your offer."

"And Ellen—have you taken leave of her already?" asked Brown.

"Assowaum never forgets those who do him a kindness," said the Indian; "the young girl saved his life, and more than that—she preserved him for his work of vengeance. My path leads past her dwelling. Good-bye!"

Again the chieftain shook his white friend's hand warmly and cordially, and did the same to his young wife. When he had got out of the house he waved a last salute, and sprang over the fence. A moment after, the rich leaves of the luxuriant brushwood closed behind him. He had disappeared in the forest—the green, fragrant forest—the true home of his tribe.

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